A qualitative investigation into practitioner perspectives of the role of customers within the design and delivery of local government contact centre services

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Chester for the degree of Doctor of Business Administration by

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Declaration

The material being presented for examination is my own work and has not been submitted for an award of this or another HEI except in minor particulars which are explicitly noted in the body of the thesis. Where research pertaining to the thesis was undertaken collaboratively, the nature and extent of my individual contribution has been made explicit.

Signature: D J Nott Date: 10th July 2018

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Abstract

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Local authorities have experienced significant cuts in income whilst grappling with increased demand, an aging population and welfare reform. This pressing imperative has driven local authorities to challenge their sense of self and in doing so consider the participative role that customers can and do play. This study sought to examine practitioner perspectives of customers, their role, impact and constraining and enabling factors within the design and delivery of local government contact centre services.

There is limited empirical research on practitioner perspectives of the role of customers within a local government environment. There are multiple terms used to describe the concept of customer but an absence of established approaches to examine the role that customers play within socially constructed phenomenon within local government demonstrating a gap in current academic thought. Whilst the rationale for involving customers in local governance is debated, the application of theory in to practice is limited thereby further constraining the opportunity for local authorities to leverage potential benefits afforded through participative approaches to the design and delivery of contact centre services.

An interpretivist stance was adopted with qualitative techniques employed within the research. Using a priori codes developed through the review of extant literature, thematic analysis of forty-four customer service strategies spanning single tier, upper tier and metropolitan local authorities was undertaken. Themes were further developed through analysis of transcripts from seventeen semi-structured interviews with managers responsible for the design and delivery of local government contact centre services.

This research highlighted the differing and often contradictory practitioner perceptions of the concept of customer and the role that customers play in the design and delivery of local government services. Whilst organisations espoused a desire to progress participative principles due to the potential benefits afforded through such approaches, the extent to which these were operationalised by practitioners was limited and this coupled with a perceived sense of passivity on the part of customers resulted in little or no positive impact on current service performance.

As extant literature and research is limited on the role of customers within local government, this study expands current academic thought providing particular insight on the practitioner perspective. The research findings provide a robust foundation on which theorists and practitioners in particular can formulate participative strategies and associated policies thereby providing meaningful opportunities for customers to co-design and co-deliver local government services and through which potential benefits, financial and non-financial, can be realised.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

Local authorities are responsible for the provision of a diverse range of public services within a given geographic area and represent a major source of employment within England with over 1m people employed within the sector (LGiU, 2017). The concept of local government has evolved in recent years with increasing levels of rationalisation and consolidation of capabilities through a process called local government reorganisation (LGR) driven largely by the need to reduce costs.

Local authorities are funded through three main sources including a central government allocation, income received through business rates and council tax, and fees or charges for services accessed (for example, parking and pest control). To date, the central government allocation represents the main source of funding and is made up of two components including grants which are ring-fenced for a specific purpose such as education or housing and a Revenue Support Grant (RSG) which is allocated to local authorities based on complex calculations informed by local demographics and the services delivered by each organisation. Total revenue expenditure for local authorities England has been falling year on year and is budgeted at £94.1 billion in 2016/17 (DCLG, 2015; DCLG, 2017).

Following Comprehensive Spending Reviews (CSR) in 2010, 2013 and 2015, local authorities have experienced a 56.3% cut in funding from central government and an expectation that this source of funding will disappear by 2020 (MCA, 2015; DCLG, 2015; DCLG, 2017). This reduction in funding has been coupled with an increase in delegated powers which is providing local authorities with greater autonomy in how they spend money thereby ensuring that public funds better address the needs of people locally (LGA, 2014; DCLG, 2017). The impact of

funding cuts and increased delegation of responsibility has created significant tension within local government organisations as they grapple to make sense of devolved powers within an increasingly challenging fiscal environment. Each organisation has had to challenge sense of self, their role, relationship with customers and what this means both in terms of short term financial balance and long term sustainability.

1.1.1 The Financial Challenge Facing Local Government

Local authorities have experienced significant cuts in income. Between 2010/11 and 2019/20, councils within England will have been subject to a 29% reduction in spending power with those areas with higher levels of deprivation suffering faster and deeper cuts (Hastings et al, 2015; LGA, 2015; DCLG, 2017). Building on savings announced as a part of the 2010 CSR, the Government undertook further spending rounds in 2013 and 2015 which set out a number of investment decisions and reforms intended to further accelerate the transformation of public service delivery. The 2013 and 2015 spending rounds set out further budget reduction for local government with an expectation that much of this would be achieved through better cooperation, sharing and collaboration between public services at a local level (HM Treasury, 2013; HM Treasury 2015).

All local authorities have responded to the challenge, delivering legal budgets that have achieved the requisite levels of savings. However, the increased scope and scale of budget cuts coupled with other cost pressures as a result of increased demand, an aging population and welfare reform means that local authorities will have to make difficult decisions around which services to protect, which to reduce and those which may need to be cut altogether (LGA, 2014, Hastings et al, 2015).

1.1.2 Cost Reduction Strategies

The financial imperative has driven local authorities to challenge their current sense of self and future role in society, all whilst continuing to deliver service continuity. Where salami-slicing may have once worked, local authorities have had to undertake both top-down strategic cost reduction assessments whilst also undertaking bottom-up reviews of where efficiencies can be delivered.

Table 1 outlines three strategies to deliver the requisite cashable efficiencies whilst delivering their statutory obligations to citizens and communities:

Strategy	Definition	Level of citizen participation
Investment	Actions that aim to reduce the need for council services or reduce the cost of services in future	Medium – Investment is focused on dampening demand for services through economic growth and preventative strategies. Long term cost reduction is predicated on citizen engagement, buy in and behaviour change.
Efficiency	Actions that aim to reduce costs of council services without changing service levels as far as the public is concerned	Medium – Efficiency is concerned with redesigning and restructuring services without impacting frontline service delivery. Citizen input should be attained to ensure that the resultant

		design reflects evolving need and expectation.
Retrenchment	Actions that reduce the council's role in terms of the services that it provides and for whom	High – Retrenchment seeks to transition council responsibility for services or facilities to citizens, communities or third party organisations. Key to the approach is attainment of a deepened sense of partnership and collaboration.

Table 1: Strategies to manage budget cuts. Adapted from (Hastings et al, 2015)

Key to the delivery of each of the cost reduction strategies is an increasing recognition of the role that customers play in service design and delivery (King et al, 1998; Pratchett, 1999; Cooper et al, 2006; Kennedy, 2007; Schumpeter, 2010; Timney, 2015). Improving service provision through citizen collaboration and participation is not a new phenomenon and whilst it gained notable attention during the New Labour administration its origins can be found in a number of Conservative policies developed during the late 1980s / early 1990s (Fotaki, 2011). During this time, there was a recognition that policy-development and implementation could no longer be government-driven and a sense that the "provider-centric" approach to service provision was no longer fit for purpose (Bovaird, 2007; Bovaird et al, 2014, Hastings et al, 2015).

1.1.3 An evolving approach to design and delivery of local government services

The shift from "provider-centric" to "customer-centric" approaches to service design and delivery was part of the New Public Management (NPM) movement and represented several ideas and practices which involved a move away from controlling bureaucracies to an organisational construct which leveraged insight from the private sector to transform ways of working. A key theme within NPM was a recognition that public servants needed to "steer rather than row" government organisations with more emphasis placed on serving and empowering citizens rather than managing and implementing (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2011; Bryson et al, 2014). This represented a fundamental change to traditional forms of governance, with NPM setting out ways in which government organisations and bodies were to involve citizens and communities in the coproduction of service planning and delivery (Bovaird, 2007; Bovaird et al, 2014). Moving to such a collaborative approach to service design and provision not only required a change to structures and processes, it also represented a significant cultural shift as citizens were no longer regarded as a passive recipient of services but as reflexive actors who are motivated, self-aware and rationale agents able to reflexively monitor the actions of self and others (Giddens, 1994). These reflexive actors whilst bound by their own capacity and capability, adapt to changing structures and processes thereby creating opportunity to play a more active role in the design and development of government services.

Dunleavy et al (2005) posits that there has been a significant shift from NPM's preoccupation with disaggregation to one focused on re-integration, needs-based holism and digitisation. Where NPM sought to disaggregate large public sector organisations to deliver marketisation, less bureaucracy, flatter structures, private-sector management styles, performance-centred service delivery and legitimate citizen participation (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011; Haikio, 2012), Dunleavy et al (2005) argue that the NPM regime created increased levels of institutional complexity, reduced levels of citizen competence and resulted in limited impact on

the level of social problem solving capability of government organisations. This view was echoed by Garrett (2017, p. 108) who argued that, "customers, formerly citizens, will have to take responsibility for participating in government decision-making seemingly with comparatively little help and advice from the government". Where NPM resulted in centralised command and control capabilities, post-NPM has focused on joined-up government, reducing fragmentation, improving integration and coordination, delivering needs-based services and digitally-enabled ways of working (Dunleavy et al, 2005, Christensen, 2012). Whilst NPM was perceived to reduce the role of citizens in public service (Dunleavy et al, 2005; Garrett, 2017), post-NPM has sought to counteract this trend through needs-based reorganisation of structures and processes and service design and delivery in collaboration with the customer to co-create value (Christensen, 2012, Vargo and Lusch, 2014; Karlsson et al, 2016).

Key to the post-NPM concept of joined-up government is a shift from vertical (single service line, for example, Council Tax collection) to horizontal integration (multiple service line spanning functional boundaries, for example, health and social care) with particular focus on delivering accurate, prompt and cost effective services centred around what customers value (Dunleavy et al, 2005, Clayton, 2013; Osborne et al, 2013). Where citizens and consumers were previously seen as passive in their interaction with government organisations, post-NPM was focused on customers being active participants in the co-creation of benefit or value. Where value was once defined by the organisation, Vargo and Lusch (2008, p. 7) argued that value must be "determined by the beneficiary" and can only be truly co-created through reciprocal actions of actors within socially constructed systems. Achieving this transition requires stronger customer orientation with clear understanding of customer needs, wants and the clarity around the role that they take as actors within the socially constructed structure and practice of government.

1.2 Purpose of the research

The post-NPM shift to customer-centred ways of working provides a way through which the relationship between citizen and state can be reset around active participation of actors and agency in the design and delivery of services (Giddens, 2000). Where the role of customers was once perceived to be passive and focused on consumption, post-NPM, associated organisational strategies and responses involve customer reflexivity, empowerment, authority, clarity of expectation and a co-creation of services that represent the needs and wants of those people accessing such services (Giddens & Pierson, 1998; Lengnick-Hall et al, 2000; Yi et al, 2011; Mukhtar et al, 2012; Donetto, 2014).

The increasingly pressing financial imperative has further heightened the need for local authorities to challenge sense of self, taking more collaborative and active approaches to service design and delivery thus ensuring service continuity and development within an ever-constrained fiscal environment (Hastings et al, 2015). However, whilst customer participation frameworks and methodologies have been explored within extant literature (Arnstein, 1969; Checkoway & Kingsley, 1978; Mills & Morris, 1986; Bitner et al, 1997; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Roberts, 2004; Cooper et al, 2006; Buckwalter, 2014; Eisingerich et al, 2014; Timney, 2015), there is limited empirical research examining the impact of customer participation on design and delivery of local government contact centre services. Where academics have posited a view, there is limited focus on the local government sector, minimal insight regarding practitioner perspectives, little consensus on the role customers play in designing and delivering local government services and the value of doing so (King et al, 1998; Pratchett, 1999; Cooper et al, 2006; Kennedy, 2007; Schumpeter, 2010; Timney, 2015; Dong et al, 2015).

The financial imperative has driven local authorities to take different approaches to long standing issues and customer participation is one such strategy to achieve the requisite organisational efficiencies (Hastings et al, 2015) whilst attempting to

address the increasing needs and expectations of customers. Seeking to achieve this shift does necessitate a need to embrace new ways of working which create value for all stakeholders both internal and external to the organisation. Grace and Iacono (2015) argue that research has typically focused on customer perspectives with limited emphasis placed on practitioners, a view echoed by Koppitsch et al (2013) and Vargo and Lusch (2014). This represents a notable gap in extant literature and as practitioners (those individuals employed by the local authority) are critical in addressing the financial crisis facing local government, driving forward new approaches and associated ways of working, securing their perspective on the role that customers play in the design and delivery of services will provide insight to address the identified research gap, provide clarity on the "analytically unspecified" role that customers play in the co-creation of value (Gronroos and Voima, 2013, p. 133) and the impact that customers have within historically goods-dominant environments (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). Within the context of this research, practitioners are defined as those individuals employed to act for and on behalf of the organisation in the design and delivery of services and the associated value created through such processes. In considering the practitioner perspective, the research is focused on individuals operating at manager, head of service and director-level with focus placed on securing their perspective or point of view on their experiences and narrative on the role of customers in the design and delivery of local government contact centre services.

It is apparent through the researcher's professional practice involving responsibility for the delivery and transformation of local government services and a review of extant literature that the participative role played by customers within the local government sector represents an area of growing interest particularly given the financial constraints these organisations are having to operate within, growing demand and increasing complexity of need through aging populations. This research therefore seeks to add to and enrich available literature on the design and delivery of contact centre-based services thereby providing a body of

insight to further current academic thought. As financial constraints continue to impact local authorities and practitioners seek new and innovative ways to meet this challenge, this research is intended to aid professional practice through the provision of insight upon which participative strategies can be developed thereby enabling a shift in how services are designed and delivered within increasingly cash constrained environments.

1.3 Research aim and objectives

The research examines the role of customers in the design and delivery of local government services and aims to articulate and examine practitioner perspectives of the concept of customers, the participative role that they play and the impact of this on service design and delivery within a contact centre environment.

The objectives of the research are to:

1. Analyse practitioner perspectives of the concept of "customer" within a local government context
2. Examine practitioner perspectives of the role that customers play in service design and delivery
3. Explore and evaluate practitioner perspectives on the impact customer participation has on service delivery
4. Determine factors enabling and / or constraining the role of customers in service design and delivery

In line with the above aim and objectives, the following research question is addressed:

> What perspectives do practitioners have on the role of customers in the design and delivery of local government contact centre services?

This research is intended to provide relevant insight which can aid future professional practice specifically within the local government sector.

1.4 Research scope and approach

Local authorities have faced wide ranging challenges as customers demand better services against a backdrop of significant financial pressures thereby driving a need to deliver more for less. Increasingly, local authorities have established contact centres to manage demand across a range of channels and services. Contact centres are functional departments where customers can perform a number of actions without having to involve other departments or staff with these centres typically resolving 80% of interactions at first point of contact. Whilst contact centres were initially focused on face to face, telephone and email channels, increasingly they have sought to support customers with electronic services which involve "digital management of routine matters" (Kallberg, 2013, p. 91). The establishment of contact centres spanning traditional and digital channels is not a new phenomenon, however, as local authorities progressively seek to drive down demand through improved service delivery and migration of services to self-serve channels they provide a key interaction point with customers and an area of public service delivery representing interest to academics and practitioners alike as organisations seek ways through which public service delivery can be improved and costs reduced (Chun et al, 2010, Gallego-Alvarez, 2010, Reddick, 2011, Hung, 2012). As the scope of contact centres continues to increase with more channels and services accessible, understanding the role that customers play in the design and delivery of these growing capabilities is increasingly important as finite resources are being leveraged to develop these functions. This research therefore examines the role of customers in the design and delivery of services provided via local government contact centres within England.

The researcher adopted an interpretive paradigmatic approach and a nominalist stance, recognising that observation of phenomena will not produce knowledge as knowledge is elicited through the opinions, narrative, attributed meaning and subjective interpretation (Neuman, 2011; Easterby-Smith et al, 2015; Saunders et al, 2016). As the research is focused on practitioner perspectives of customer role in design and delivery of contact centre-based services, the relationality between these actors within the social context to which they relate (the intersect between customer and local government contact centre service design and provision) and how they are reflexively ordered (the role each actor plays), a relativist ontological stance was adopted as interpretation and subjectivity are critical when considering the thoughts and perspectives of research participants (Giddens, 1993; Neuman, 2011; Hatch, 2013). With research focused on the role of customers, this research was approached through the lens of structuration theory thereby providing a theoretical framework through which socially constructed rules and resources and their impact on the production and constraint of social systems can be examined (Giddens, 1984). The subjective nature of interpretivism and close proximity of the researcher to phenomena being explored has required specific focus on reflexivity both in terms of the context of knowledge and how it is constructed through the research process. Throughout the research the researcher has reflexively examined sense of self and the associated relationship to research subjects and insight constructed through the research process (Mason, 1996; Stokes, 2011; Bryman & Bell, 2015).

The research involved the collation and analysis of organisational strategy documents. Organisational documentation represents a key source of primary literature and provides useful insight on each organisation's strategy around customer, their role and existing or planned approaches to participation. Thematic analysis of these documents provided a mechanism through which early inferences were made and questions identified which were explored further through other data collection processes (Yin, 2014; Bryman & Bell, 2015; Saunders et al, 2016).

Leveraging insight from organisational strategies, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with practitioners from across the local government sector. As a practitioner perspective was critical to the research, focus was placed on interviewing those participants operating at manager as prior professional experience had consistently demonstrated that these capabilities were involved in strategic development and operational service delivery thereby bridging the gap between strategic intent and how this played out in practice. Thematic analysis was undertaken on interview transcripts with further iterative development of the thematic codebook and associated perspectives of emerging critical thought (Ragin & Amoroso, 2011). As the practitioner's perspective was critical to the research, attributed meaning and interpretation of phenomena was explored through the analytical process (Giddens, 1993; Neuman; 2011).

1.5 Structure of the document

This research study consists of six chapters covering the following elements:

Chapter one outlines the background and rationale for the research including an overview of the theoretical and empirical gap in practice. The research purpose, aims, objectives and approach are outlined.

Chapter two examines descriptive labels for citizens, consumers and customers apparent within extant literature, the role of social action in establishing structure and practice, actor participation within the local government sector and specifically participation in the design and delivery of services. The literary review grounds the research problem, providing context to the research aims and objectives.

Chapter three outlines the research philosophy, approach, strategy and techniques to be used within the context of this study. Methodological methods are examined

and justification made for their suitability in addressing the research aim and addressing the research objectives.

Chapter four introduces the findings from the research, highlighting key insights and conclusions drawn from data analysis techniques employed and outlined within chapter three.

Chapter five builds on the findings of the research with analysis and discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of these findings.

Chapter six summaries the research with conclusions set out, the contribution to professional practice discussed, limitations of the study examined and recommendations for further research explored.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter critically reviews current literature relating to practitioner perspectives of customers and their role in the design and delivery of services. This chapter consists the following sections: the first section discusses and defines citizens, consumers and customers; section two highlights key theories and concepts relating to social action with particular focus on the agency of individuals as opposed to perceived power associated with social structures; the participative role customers play in local government is critically reviewed in the third section; key insights from the literature are summarised and associated gaps presented in the final section.

Local authorities have long sought to improve engagement with customers through the development of relationship management approaches which seek to devolve power and influence to customers, communities and service users (Osborne et al, 2013; Firmstone & Coleman, 2015; Wirtz & Langer, 2016). However, the mechanisms used can be seen to fall short of providing the requisite insight and engagement needed to respond to developments within the private sector, new market conditions and customer requirements (Normann, 2001, Michel et al, 2008; Osborne et al, 2014; Thomas, 2013; Badia et al, 2014). Bovaird & Loeffler (2014) argue that current approaches do not only fall short but rather there is a lack of understanding across local government of the ways in which customers and communities are engaged meaning that the potential benefits of such approaches are therefore not being fully maximised.

Successive governments have increasingly focused on customer and community involvement as a way of optimising service provision and improving democratic accountability. However, whilst the prevalence of such approaches has increased

with local authorities seeking to enter in to partnership arrangements with their customers (Rowley et al, 2007; Clayton, 2013; Osborne et al, 2013), there are differing views on the benefits of adopting such approaches particularly when considering the extent to which customers and communities can positively influence decisions about service design and delivery (Foot, 2009; Bovaird et al, 2015; Kroll et al, 2017, Garrett, 2017). This is a view echoed by Dong et al (2015) who argue that whilst co-creation of products and services is increasing, the evidence of tangible outcomes being achieved is limited and inconsistent within published literature.

2.2 Citizens, Consumers and Customers

Moving to a joined-up approach to service provision represents a significantly different relationship between customers, communities and government and one, which requires more than a programme of change but rather a recasting of how local government is designed and how services are delivered within an increasingly cash-constrained environment. For this approach to work, local government has to fundamentally rethink how customers are engaged, better understand how participation can drive improved customer insight and how customers and communities can be empowered in meaningful ways (Ellison & Hardey, 2014; Carr-West et al, 2016; Gilbert, 2017). Whilst securing an understanding of current approaches to engagement and ways of working are essential, one could argue that there are preceding and more fundamental questions that need to be answered first.

In seeking to gain a detailed appreciation of the role of customers in the design and delivery of local government contact centre services, the first question which needs to be considered is what or who constitutes a customer and how does this differ, if at all, to other terms such as consumer, citizen and service user which are apparent within academic texts and journals and which are used widely within practitioner

discourse (McLaughlin, 2009; Clayton, 2013; Bodolica et al, 2015). During both the New Public Management (NPM) and post-NPM social movements, consumerist discourse became increasingly prevalent and was often used interchangeably with the terms citizen, customer and service user (Newman & Clarke, 2009). In exploring the first of these terms, consumer can be defined as a person who uses a resource or destroys completely (Waite, 2017). This negative perspective is apparent across a range of academic literature and remains evident when considering perceived excesses associated with contemporary consumerism (Gabriel & Lang, 2006; Clarke et al, 2007; Farrell, 2010; Crook & Wood, 2014; Bovaird & Loeffler, 2014). Recent policy discourse has resulted in a more favourable view of the term consumer evidenced by a shift in how local authorities are managed couple with increasing customer expectations and the resultant behavioural shift that this brings. Whereas a citizen would be viewed as isolated, unaware and passive, consumers appear connected, informed and active (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Corbett, 2014; McShane & Sabadoz, 2015; Osborne et al, 2016; Lawler, 2016). Where citizens must consider the views of the communities within which they are based and with whom they interact, consumers need not consider these constraints and can therefore act freely exercising "power to choose" without "social obligation" (McShane & Sabadoz, 2015; Gabriel and Lang, 2015). Clarke et al (2007) suggest that consumers are empowered to challenge the "paternalistic powers" of the professions and as a result have demanded services which are more efficient, responsive, flexible and provide a level of choice not previously seen (Malpass et al, 2007). This perspective very much aligns with Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration whereby social actors have the ability to act in a primarily voluntaristic way with social actors having the "capacity to act freely, behave in an unconstrained way and make independent choices" (Bodolica et al, 2015, p. 792) and Gabriel and Lang's (2015) view of consumerism as a political ideology and social movement where consumers increasingly demand that the gap between the perceived quality of those products and services provided by private entities in the market place and those delivered by the state be closed.

The social movement associated with contemporary consumerism can be seen to align with what Giddens (1994, p. 7) termed "social reflexivity" where previously established norms, values and ways of working hold less relevance:

> *The development of social reflexivity is the key influence on a diversity of changes that otherwise seem to have little in common. Thus the emergence of 'post-Fordism' in industrial enterprises is usually analysed in terms of technolocal change – particularly the influence of information technology. But the underlying reason for the growth of 'flexible production' and 'bottom-up decision-making' is that a universe of high reflexivity leads to greater autonomy of action, which the enterprise must recognise and draw on.*
>
> *The same applies to bureaucracy and to the sphere of politics. Bureaucratic authority, as Max Weber made clear, used to be a condition for organisational effectiveness. In a more reflexively ordered society, operating in the context of manufacturered uncertainty, this is no longer the case. The old bureaucratic systems start to disappear, the dinosaurs of the post-traditional age. In the domain of politics, states can no longer so readily treat their citizens as 'subjects'.*

Whilst one may perceive that social reflexivity results in a devaluing of politics, governance and power (Corbett, 2014), Giddens (1998) argues the opposite, suggesting that through the evolution from passive recipient into a reflexive actor, power and authority is not corroded but actually strengthened as democratic processes are increasingly underpinned by active and participatory principles. These principles in turn lay the foundation for more collaborative engagement between citizens, consumers, customers and the organisations with which they interact (Beck et al, 2012; Hermann, 2012; Corbett, 2014).

Fotaki (2011), however, argues that the multiple identities of consumers, their individual and collective identity assertion and political ideologies are incompatible with the goals and nature of public services. Where citizens are defined by the community to which they belong and the services that they access, the term consumer is typified by a sense of plurality and diversity of demand which spans a far greater spectrum than that covered by citizen or citizenship (McShane & Sabadoz, 2015). Within this context, consumerism can be seen to align with concepts of marketisation and commodification of government services both of which were central tenets to the NPM social movement whereby services are seen as standardised, packaged commodities the value of which is determined by those consuming the product.

Whereas the distinction between citizen and consumer is apparent in academic and policy literature, the difference between consumer and customer is less stark. For a period of time, customers were seen as passive consumers of products and services (Lengnick-Hall et al, 2000), however, increasingly customers are an integral part of the end to end value chain providing insight to enable service innovation, being directly involved in the co-design of new products and services or acting as an advocate for the organisation with which they are engaged (Mukhtar et al 2012). Leveraging knowledge, insight and experience from customers has gained a level of traction following the growth of the web and 'crowdsourcing' type activities, which involves the uses of technology to secure insight from large numbers of people. Whilst the application of crowdsourcing was initially deployed within a commercial context, government organisations have been increasingly using the concept to enable greater participation in service design, development and associated decision-making. One example is Our MK which provides an online platform through which people can submit ideas, start projects or volunteer to help improve communities within Milton Keynes. Within a health and social care environment, experience-based co-design has been used since 2005 to improve services through participatory research and observation,

narrative-based interviews and user-centred design. Through this method, customers work in partnership with care professionals to design and develop the care that they receive (Donetto, 2014). However, whilst pockets of good practice exist, analysis of extant literature suggests an absence of established frameworks, methods and approaches which have been consistently deployed practically within the local government sector.

A review of extant literature has identified a number of terms used to describe those individuals or actors accessing products or services with differing views as to the applicability of those terms within a local government context (McLaughlin, 2009; Clayton, 2013; Bodolica et al, 2015). Whilst there is much debate around the differing definitions of such terms, there is a notable gap in the literature around the importance of these terms and whether those accessing government services distinguish between the many identities that academics and practitioners have developed (Garrett, 2017). Whilst a plethora of terms exist, does this make a material difference when considering the intersect between customers and the structures with which they interact?

The evolution of academic and practitioner discourse during the NP and post-NPM movements has seen a perceived shift in the role and nature of customers from a state of consumption to one which is underpinned by active engagement involving two-way dialogue with organisations (Beck et al, 2012; Hermann, 2012; Corbett, 2014, Garrett, 2017). This shift involves customers actively defining their expectations and co-creating products or services that the market needs and wants (Giddens, 1998; Mukhtar et al, 2012; Donetto, 2014). This evolution is explored within the following table:

Timeline	Customer Role
1970s, early 1980s	• Customers are passive with their role being one of consumption

	• The customer role is limited to voice, whereby they express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction of a product or service, and exit, which involves the customer choosing alternate products or services but this latter stage is dependent on choice within the marketplace • No engagement in the design, development and delivery of products and services
Late 1980s and early 1990s	• Customers remain passive consumers • The individual attributes of customers are increasingly recognised by organisations and influence marketing and relationship management activities (introduction of customer loyalty programmes gains significant traction). • Customer voice is used to inform design, development and delivery of products and services
1990s and early 2000s	• Customers take a more active role in service design and delivery • Customer insight is increasingly used to drive targeted relationship marketing activities • The exponential growth of web-enablement drives two-way engagement and access to services • Customers increasingly undertake activities or service operations as defined by the organisation • User input and customer insight is used to shape products and services
Mid 2000s and early 2010s	• Progressive shift from customer insight to customer involvement with customers actively engaged to co-create value • Service-dominant approaches centred around interactive processes between customers and service providers

	• Customers have a number of roles in value co-creation including collaborator, codeveloper, designer, tester, support specialist and marketer
Mid to late 2010s	• Customer empowerment gains traction with consumers seeking a role greater than consumption • Increased focus on co-development of employee and customer competence and values • Shift to customer-dominant logic • Customer to customer co-creation of value is increasingly prevalent • Customers co-create at two levels: co-creation for use and co-creation for others. Co-creation for use is undertaken for the customer's own benefits whereas co-creation for others is focused on benefits for the wider customer base or community.

Table 2. Evolution of customer roles (Hirschman, 1970; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2000; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Graf, 2007; Vargo and Lusch, 2008; Nambisan, 2008; Voima et al, (2010); Elg et al, 2012; Mukhtar et al, 2012; Edvardsson et al, 2013; Corbett, 2014; McShane & Sabadoz, 2015; Omar et al, 2016; Luu et al, 2018; Rihova et al, 2018).

This discussion has identified the growing importance and involvement of citizens, consumers and customers in the design and delivery of products and services. Where citizens and consumers were once seen as passive in their interactions with value created by the "producer" and "consumed" by the customer (Vargo et al, 2008), organisations are increasingly recognising the active role that customers can and do play in developing and delivering new products and services thereby

enabling value to be co-created and realised by all parties. Where value was previously defined by the supplier or provider, Vargo and Lusch (2008) argue that value is co-created through a service-dominant exchange of resources between providers, customers and associated co-creators. Consistent with Giddens perspective on rules and resources enabling and constraining social constructs, service dominant approaches bring social actors together as resource integrators in value co-creation processes (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2008). Value does not lie within individual resources nor can it be viewed beyond the socially constructed system within which it is embedded (Lusch, 2010). Service-dominant approaches to customer co-creation have faced criticism for their perceived focus on an organisational-based view with value creation processes being approached from the provider's perspective rather than the customer's experience of value (Heinonen et al, 2010). Gronroos and Gummerus (2014) echo this assertion arguing that SDL is primarily concerned with social processes driven by organisations in the pursuit of value creation for customers, however, one could argue that this is an over-simplification of SDL as Vargo and Lusch (2008) posit that "value is always co-created, jointly and reciprocally" (Vargo and Lusch, 2008, p. 146) with value "determined by the beneficiary" (Vargo and Lusch, 2008, p. 7). These differing perspectives do raise questions around role and who is perceived to be the active party in the co-creation of value be it the service provider or customer, the focus of which is directly relevant to the objectives of this programme of research as one seeks to understand practitioner perspectives of this phenomenon.

As co-created value is determined by customers and service providers, customers have increasingly sought a shift in the relationship between themselves and the organisations with which they engage and interact. As customers and service providers increasingly sought opportunities to co-create value, early developments in this space were largely seen as being contributory in terms of the role that customers played as focus was placed on how customers can increase

organisational productivity by transferring aspects of service to them to undertake (Graf, 2007). Typical examples of this include channel-shift activities whereby tasks previously undertaken by organisational employees are transferred or shifted to customers to undertake themselves via digital channels. Within this context, the action and interaction is determined by the organisation with roles being productive or contributory in nature with the purpose being to aid quality, satisfaction and value (Bitner et al, 1997). Whilst contributory forms of engagement and participation remain, a fundamental recasting of responsibilities is increasingly apparent with customers adopting new roles and behaviours to become a source of competence, innovation and advocacy, through which value is truly co-created for themselves and the organisation (Prahalad, 2000; Chervonnaya, 2003; Graf, 2007; Närvänen, 2014, Vargo and Lusch, 2014).

As the interactions and actions of citizens, consumers and customers have evolved, arguably so has the balance of power between customers and the organisation with which they engage. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2000, 2004) see this shift in power as being directly influenced by the agility that customers and customer groups have both in terms of the speed at which they can mobilise around particular issues or topics and their increased knowledge and awareness of information pertinent to the products and services accessed. Organisations have had to respond, moving away from administrative traditions which have constrained their ability to flex and adapt to new and evolving customer requirements, implementing structural and cultural changes to ensure that they can appropriately adapt and respond to increased customer participation (Pateman, 1970; Ostrom and Ostrom, 1977; Peters, 2008; Parrado et al, 2013; Mustak et al, 2013). With customers assuming a greater role in the value-creation process, often involving innovation and advocacy-type competencies, the bigger the potential impact on those employees engaged within the organisation. This shift has required new skills and capabilities within the organisation particularly within the space of relationship development and management. With customers adopting increasingly complex roles and the

interface between customer, employee and organisation often blurred, the scope for role conflict and ambiguity is heightened (Graf, 2007; McShane & Sabadoz, 2015).

Seeking to better understand the role of citzen, consumer and customer has highlighted differing perspectives on the definitions of each term and the context within which they are used in practical discourse. The terms and associated perspectives around these words has reinforced the need to explore both roles within the context of each term and the intersect between customer and the organisation with which they engage and through which value can be co-created. To focus on "terms" or labels in isolation does so at the expense of understanding the complexity of the relationship between the various actors involved (Newman & Clarke, 2009). This complexity and the many contradictions associated with consumerist discourse, customer participation and the dynamic nature of relationships and interactions led Gabriel and Lang (2015) to a view of unmanageability whereby the actions of citizens, consumers or customers cannot be viewed in isolation and must therefore be considered within the context of the socially constructed reality within which they relate.

2.3 Social Action

There is a plethora of academic research on social theory and the role of action in establishing social structure and practice (Orlikowski, 2000; Jones & Karsten 2008; Wodak & Meyer, 2009; Al Rawahi et al, 2016; Omar et al, 2016). Exploring the subjective meaning of actions was a critical component within Weber's theory of social action, which latterly considered the influence of technology and bureaucracies and their organising influences on social actors, was apparent in Bhaskar's model of social action, Habermas' theory of communicative action, Foucault's archaeology of knowledge and Bourdieu's social theory as habitus

(Bhaskar, 1979; Habermas, 1985; Calhoun et al, 1993; Foucault, 2002; Archer, 2010; King, 2010; Giddens & Sutton, 2013).

A key theme apparent within extant literature relates to the connection between individual and society and whether one approaches this issue by emphasising, "the agency of individuals or the power of social structures" (Elliott, 2014, p. 11). As this research is concerned with the intersect between customers and local government and the role of actors, their reflexive actions and the impact they have within the context of service design and delivery, the researcher has a greater interest in the rules and relationships and how they recursively relate (Porpora, 1989; O'Boyle, 2013), rather than organisational structures which Giddens (1984) argues, "exist only in so far as there is continuity in social reproduction across time and space… such continuity in turn exists in and through the reflexively monitored activities of situated actors". It is this context which is critical in making sense of customer roles within socially created constructs associated with local government service design and delivery.

As Gidden's structuration theory is focused on a duality of structure and agency, it has particular theoretical relevance to this programme of study and is explored further within the following sections.

2.3.1 Giddens' Structuration Theory

Giddens' structuration theory was borne out of a frustration with structural functionalist academic thought, where emphasis is placed on "pronounced macro level orientation" (Bodolica et al 2015, p. 796) and "the power of social structures" rather than the subjective meaning of actions (Elliot, 2014, p. 11). Giddens argued that such theories regarded structure and system as "more or less equivalent" (Bryant & Jary, 2011, p. 7), were "strong on structure but weak on action" (Giddens, 1993, p. 4) with focus placed on "the pre-eminence of the social whole over its individual parts" (Giddens, 1984, p. 1) thereby failing to recognise the complexity

of socially created constructs and the "reciprocal relationship between agency and structure" (O'Boyle, 2013, p. 1020).

The interaction between structure and agency are key components within Giddens' theory of structuration, which is concerned with how "structure is constituted through action, and reciprocally how action is constituted structurally" (Giddens, 1993, p. 169). Structuration theory provides a way through which social phenomena comprising social structure and action can "be viewed, not as independent and conflicting elements, but as a mutually interacting duality" (Jones & Karsten, 2003, p. 5). As actors interact with social structures, these actions result in a recursive creation and re-creation of socially constructed phenomena. The "series of ongoing activities and practices that people carry on reproduce larger institutions" (Giddens and Pierson, 1998, p. 76). This intersect between social actors and institutions which in the context of this research is represented by customers, practitioners and the local authority is critical in understanding the socially constructed reality created through a cyclical process of interaction between social actors, the rules that govern these interactions and the interpretation that one makes of such phenomena. One must therefore consider role, the nature of those interactions and the resultant social structures formed.

Human Agency

Giddens' views human agency as the ability to act in a primarily voluntaristic way with social actors having the "capacity to act freely, behave in an unconstrained way and make independent choices" (Bodolica et al, 2015, p. 19). For Giddens (1989, p. 258), actors are highly autonomous and possess the capability of "doing otherwise" in any given socially constructed reality. Where Marx and Bourdieu viewed structure as a constraining force with agency bound by that structure and the constraints within (Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens & Sutton, 2017), Giddens argues that agency and structure "imply each other" with structure representing an enabling force allowing human agency, through recursive actions and

interpretation, to create and re-create social structures (Giddens & Sutton, 2017, p. 25). This voluntaristic view of human agency has been subject to significant criticism with Archer (2010, p. 234) arguing that such focus on an actor's ability to act otherwise in any given circumstance has led to a "systematic underplaying of constraints" resulting in an artificial inflation of an actor's "freedom for action". Bryant and Jary (2001, p. 17-18) concur, arguing that Giddens' fails to address the "conditions of action", which inherently shape and constrain human agency and are so critical in the formation of social constructs. With focus placed on the enabling forces between agency and structure, one does naturally question the extent to which Giddens acknowledges and recognises the nature of constraint when considering the voluntaristic nature of human agency. These critical perspectives do provide a somewhat misleading view of structuration and the voluntaristic nature of human agency as Giddens himself acknowledges the existence of structural constraints which both pre-exist and influence the creation of social constructs (Giddens, 1984; Thompson, 1989; Stones, 2005). Giddens (1984, p. 176-177) proposes, "[constraints are] best described as placing limits upon the feasible range of options open to an actor in a given circumstance or type of circumstance". That said, Giddens also contends that, "all social actors, no matter how lowly, have some degree of penetration of the social forms which oppress them" (Giddens, 1979, p. 72) and can "at any phase…. act in a matter somewhat different than she did" thereby reinforcing the voluntaristic nature of human agency (Giddens, 1984, p. 15).

Giddens perspective on agency and constraint does create an unhelpful tension particularly when attempting to balance structural constraint with an actors' ability to act otherwise in any given situation. Giddens (1984) acknowledges that constraints can and do limit the options available to actors but contends that even with one option, the voluntaristic nature of human agency remains. Thompson (1989, p. 74) argues that this perspective does not resolve the tension, rather it "merely bypasses the problem by reaffirming a concept of agency which is, for all

practical purposes, irrelevant". This perspective is supported by a number of theorist who argue that Giddens has failed to effectively resolve the voluntarism and determinism dualism (Thompson, 1989; Bryant and Jary, 2001; Archer, 2010; King, 2010). Thompson (1989, p. 74) argues that a "more direct confrontation" of the issues apparent within this dyad is required with focus placed on the "wants and desires that are relevant to individual action and choice". This represents a critical consideration within the context of this study particularly in relation to practitioner perspectives of the role of customers and the underlining needs and wants that customers have within given socially constructed realities.

The Macro and Micro

Structuration can be seen to link both macro and micro aspects with each actant interaction supporting a cyclical production of social structures. Collins (1981, p. 988) describes this as methodological situationalism whereby macro events consist of "aggregations and repetitions" of micro-events. If one applies this perspective to Giddens (1979, p. 5) view that structures are recursively organised as a result of the "constitution of agent and social practices", then structure can be viewed as a macro-event consisting of multiple micro-events. This perspective aligns with Elias' (1939) theory of figuration whereby actors exist within interdependent networks where sense of self, process and structure are created through a social process of changing figurations consisting micro and macro phenomena (Mennell, 1998). This reductionist approach to social thought can be seen as simplifying the complexity of encounters with macro phenomena seen as little more than the building up of micro level behaviours (Porpora, 1989). Where some theorists try to 'bridge' the micro-macro continuum through an expansion of conversational encounters and "interaction ritual chains" (Collins, 1981, p. 985), Elias sought to avoid the debate entirely as focusing on and making sense of the shifting nature of figurations means that one has to understand both macro and micro phenomena if we are to make sense of structure and agency (Giddens & Sutton, 2013). Adopting such a stance means that macro-events cannot exist as a

construct without the existence of micro phenomena. To treat these levels separately would therefore be at the expense of understanding the inherent influence that arguably micro events have on the macro perspective and vice versa. Naturally, adopting a multi-level or multi-dimensional perspective introduces a perceived hierarchy of social interaction which Mouzelis (1993, p. 24) suggests results in a simplification of the "hierarchical and onion-like system-within-system nature of complex social wholes". In seeking to examine the role of customers at that intersect between agency and structure, the micro phenomena represented as lived experiences of practitioners is critical in understanding the role of customers and the influence of these micro events on the macro perspective of local government.

The 'duality of structure'

Giddens (1982, p. 29) view of social action theories which he sees as "strong on actions, weak on institutions". In response, Giddens focuses on the reproduction of structures through a process of duality of structure and a process of structuration (May, 1996). From this perspective, the duality of structure and agency are seen to "presuppose and require one another" (Tucker, 1998, p. 71) with structure argued to exist in the "generating moment" between agent and social practice (Giddens, 1979, p. 5). This duality both enables and constrains human agency as structure is both "condition and consequence" in the production of interactions (Giddens, 1993, p. 165). This perceived cause and effect is seen as an oversimplification of the complexity and tension associated with the objective (material) and subjective (ideal) realms argued to exist within socially constructed phenomena (Porpora, 1989).

In contrast to functionalist authors who saw structure as being concerned with function, order and social equilibrium, underpinned by deterministic, objective and nomothetic or quantitative principles (Giddens, 2007; O'Boyle, 2013), Giddens views structure as a set "rules and resources, organised as properties of social

systems" (Giddens, 1984, p. 25). These rules determine social positions based on relative differences in power and the resources, or relationships as Porpora (1989, p. 351) argues these to be, determine the "rule-following activity of human actors". These rules and resources are not mechanistic nor are they generalisable to society as a whole as is posited within the realm of structural functionalism, rather they operate within the bounds of three dimensions of structure consisting signification, domination and legitimation as set out within Figure 1 (p. 38). Whilst these dimensions provide a frame within which duality of structure can exist, the failure to acknowledge a role for structural causation is argued to be problematic when looking beyond momentary interactions, where praxis and structure exist in that corresponding moment of structuration, and considering large-scale macro-level social processes (Layder, 1981; Archer, 1995; O'Boyle, 2013).

Giddens (1993) suggests that the internalised rules within given social structures do not constrain the actions of individuals within socially constructed environments. This perspective is counter to his earlier recognition of the nature of constraint and the impact on human agency in terms of the options available to them (Giddens, 1984). This change of position which is explored within the earlier section (see Human Agency section, p. 32) and is representative of the some of the criticism that structuration theory has received particularly in relation to the "loose and abstract" conceptualisation of agency, structure and the intersect between the two (Thompson, 1989, p. 62).

The duality of structure involves agents who repeatedly draw upon rules and resources to create social structures of meaning, morality and relations of power (Giddens, 1993). However, the rules and resources required to create social structures are argued to have no existence outside the instantiation of agency meaning that structure cannot pre-exist action (Layder, 1981; Archer, 1995). Stones (2001, p. 54) argues that this to be a, "highly misleading picture of structuration theory" as Layder (1981) and Archer (1995) both recognise the

existence of rules and resources in socially constructed phenomena and in doing so must acknowledge their pre-existence thereby allowing agents to drawn upon at the moment that they are required. Whilst Giddens himself places notable focus on the voluntaristic nature of human agency and their "capacity to act freely" (Bodolica et al, 2015, p. 19), he acknowledges himself the pre-existence of structural properties which constrain and place "limits upon the range of options open to an actor" (Giddens, 1984, p. 177). Individual actors cannot change these constraints and must therefore operate within the bounds of these structural properties. Thompson (1989) and Porpora (1989) echo a similar view arguing that structure is more than rules and resources, and involves a material reality which exerts pressure on agents thereby shaping their actions. Porpora (1989, p. 346) does however share a note of caution suggesting that one should not give primacy to material circumstance as to do so means that one adopts a deterministic (or positivist) view of materialism thereby resulting in actors becoming "mere carriers of structure", rather, adoption of a non-reductive approach allows materialist primacy without the need to adopt deterministic laws.

The cyclical development of social structure results in the creation of a broader system of language which in turn enables the social construction of reality (Chaffee & Lemert, 2009; Flaherty, 2009). Wittgenstein (1958) viewed language as consisting two parts; an inorganic component where signs are handled and an organic part where understanding, meaning and interpretation occurs. Wittgenstein (1958, p. 83) viewed language as forms of life which consisted of a "process of learning to live as a social being". Blaikie (2011) referred to these forms of life as rules which form the basis for reason and motivation of beings within a social context. For Giddens, the connection between language with practice creates the notion of social praxis. This duality involves agents constructing a social world or structure through their actions, which in turn is conditioned or constrained by the construct that they have created (Giddens,

1981). This praxis or social structure cannot continue in isolation and its existence is dependent on the actions of agents interacting with it (Stones, 2007).

Key to Giddens' theory of structuration are three elements which enable the recursive creation of social constructs which include "the communication of meaning, the exercise of power and the evaluation and judgement of conduct" (Giddens, 1977, p. 132). These elements represent a critical underpinning to the process of structuration which is set out in Figure 1 and critically discussed in the following sections.

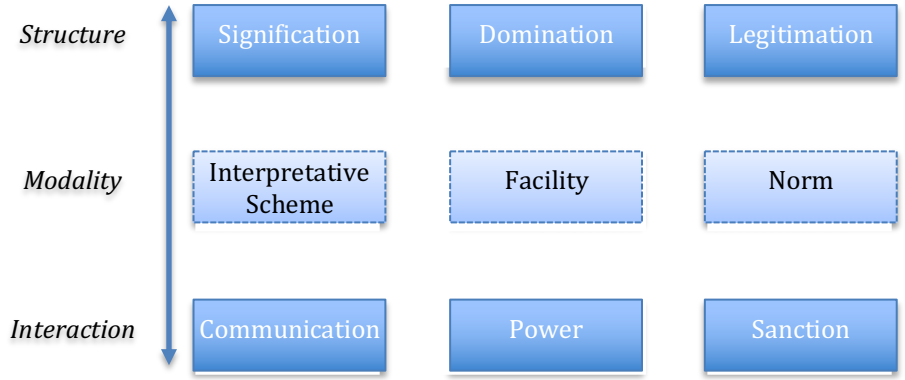

Figure 1. Components of the process of structuration. Adapted from Giddens (1984).

The first dimension of structure, signification, refers to the rules governing communication and image, which within the context of local government may be typified by an individual's role and the clothing that they wear. Understanding or interpreting one's role is critical within this context as vertical communication between senior and subordinate actors or provider (supplier) and customer can be argued to introduce expressions of power which are not necessarily noted where communication is amongst peers. Bryant and Jary (2011) argue that the nature of structuration theory and the macro level perspective inherent within this approach means that focus is at the ontological generalist level thereby making it difficult to

consider the substantive nature of particular interactions or communications. Giddens and Sutton (2013) argued a differing perspective, positing that one must consider both macro and micro phenomena if we are to make sense of agency and structure. Considering communication as conversational encounters rather than through an ontological level of abstraction aligns with Elias' (1939) theory of figurations whereby actors exist within interdependent networks where sense of self and structure are created through a social process of changing figurations consisting micro and macro phenomena (Collins, 1981; Mennell, 1998). Communication between social actors and how this manifests itself in practice is critical in determining social identity, perceptions of role and where power is perceived to lie all of which are key to this programme of research (McPhee & Tompkins, 1986; Haslam et al, 2003; Hogg, 2016).

Structures of legitimation are concerned with theories of "normative regulation" and define the appropriateness based on particular societal norms, values and standards (Giddens, 1984, p. 31). Within socially constructed realities, normative regulation is valid when collective consensus is achieved between actors and where actions are authorised and endorsed through conformity and influence. The collective consensus that Giddens (1984) sets out appears somewhat straightforward, however, scratching beneath the surface, one can see a level of complexity which Giddens fails to articulate in any depth of detail. The absence of any detail on normative theory, the structures of legitimation and the virtual orders which only come in to being at the point of instantiation leads to a sense of uncertainty around their existence and or pre-existence (McLennan, 1984, Stones, 2001). Giddens (1984) does not elaborate on this point leaving the answer open to interpretation, however, Dornbusch and Scott (1975) argued that an underlying authority system must pre-exist thereby providing social actors with a framework through which authority can be applied by direction or delegation and more importantly evaluated. Stones (2005, 2012) argues the point further suggesting that the scale of abstraction at which structures of legitimation are considered by

Giddens means that very little focus has been placed on how the underlying authority systems associated with normative regulation integrate with the structures of domination and signification.

The inclusion of evaluating rights within the context of structures of legitimation is a key component of structuration theory particularly when considering the reflexive monitoring, rationalisation and motivation of and for action and how this is regulated within recursively produced social constructs (Bryant & Jary, 2011). For normative regulation to exist and operate in a positive way, subjects must be free to act, exercising their right to decide how they behave based on their interest and ideology. Without this capacity and capability, normative regulation can result in less than favourable outcomes including resistance and non-intended behaviours (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 2013). The assumption around free-will introduces consideration relating to reflexivity and the voluntaristic nature of human agency and differing perspectives on the extent to which agents can act with or without constraint (Archer, 2010; Giddens, 1984; Bourdieu, 1998; Thompson, 1989; Giddens, 1989; Bryant and Jary, 2001; Stones, 2005; Bodolica et al, 2015; Giddens & Sutton, 2017). For Bourdieu (1977, 1998), human agency does not act reflexively but rather people are constrained by real world conditions including their own differentiated 'habitus' or disposition, their tendencies and perceptions, rather than the carefree way articulated by Giddens. O'Brien et al (1999, p. 124) echo this assertion arguing that Giddens "sunny sense" of reflexivity is somewhat misplaced as not all people have "access to the playful possibilities of reflexive identity construction available to 'clever' people".

Lastly, domination refers to the degree of power that one is considered to have and relates directly to resource allocation and authorisation. Allocative resources are those social actors who have a transformative capacity whereby they have, "command over objects, goods or material phenomena" and other persons or actors within the relevant socially constructed context (Giddens, 1984, p. 33).

Domination within this context is focused on the application of means to achieve defined outcomes through mobilisation of appropriate resources (Giddens, 1993) rather than a bureaucratic organised domination the primary goal of which is allocation of power (Habermas, 1985). Power represents a key theme within social theory and has been a common feature of public policy reform across the UK with central government legislating to ensure that communities have the power to make informed decisions about local public services and is a critical consideration within the context of agent role (DCLG, You've Got The Power: A quick and simple guide to community rights, 2013). However, when considering power within the context of structuration theory, Giddens does not provide a clear explanation as to the difference between power and resource allocation and authorisation nor does he provide insight on the plurality of agency and the resultant competing for power that can ensue (Thompson, 1989; Bodolica et al 2015). Against this latter point, there are many differing definitions of power but within the context of this research, Laverack's (2016, p. 11) three variations of power including, "power-from-within, power-over and power-with" provide a more digestible and useful continuum through which power can be explained within social constructs and demonstrates a depth of detail lacking within Giddens work. Where Giddens (1985, p. 7) refers to power as a "transformative capacity", providing agents with "the capability to intervene in a given set of events so as in some way to change them", one could argue that the abstract nature of this statement does make it somewhat challenging to apply the concept within an operational environment (Bryant and Jary, 1991). For Giddens, domination cannot be considered in isolation and must be viewed in its connection with signification and legitimation as failure to do so could lead to a distorted view of social phenomena (Giddens, 1984; Stones, 2009).

The theory of structuration and the intersect between agency and structure

The amalgamation of structure and agency (represented as Interaction in Figure 1) is perceived to be a notable limitation when considering methodological and

substantive research within the social sciences. The abstract nature of structuration theory involving recursive creation and re-creation of structures which are "formed in the intersection of the passing" (Giddens, 1984, p. 35) and social practice of actors is argued to be a notable weakness (Archer, 2010). Archer argues that the focus on virtual social constructs created in the moment limits the extent to which social scientists can analyse the creation of social constructs across time and space. However, Coad et al (2015, p. 165) argues that the study of structures at two different points in time is of less importance and what is of interest is how structures evolve from one point to another based on the "micro, meso and macro relationships" between social actors.

A notable point of concern in the use of structuration theory relates to its relevance to empirical research (Thompson, 1989; Jones & Dugdale, 2001; Stones, 2005; Jones & Karston, 2008). The generalised nature of structuration theory whereby structures and agents are viewed at a conceptual or abstract level is argued to fail to see the notable distinction between the philosophical and practical. Stones (2005, p. 7-8) refers to this generalist perspective as "ontology in general" and argues that for social constructs to be viewed at a point in time, one should embrace a process of "ontology in situ" thereby closing the gap between the philosophical and practical dimensions of structuration. Given that Giddens (1984, p. 4-5) has clearly stated that structures are recursively created through the "constitution of agent and social practices", then the research would arguably involve a level of detail as the coming together of agents and practice implies a level of granularity beyond that observable at the abstract level. It is this granular level and the practitioner perspective of that coming together of agency and praxis that is critical both in examining the intersect between agency and structure but also interpretation of the roles that agents play.

2.4 Customer participation in the design and delivery of local government services

Customers are becoming more engaged with organisations and are increasingly eager to be involved in the design, development and delivery of goods and services (Ramaswamy & Gouillart, 2010). This heightened level of involvement has been expedited by the growth of social networks which provide limitless opportunities for customers to share service insights and experiences. Roser et al (2009) see this shift in approach to service design and development as benefiting customers and organisations alike, with customers benefitting from greater personalisation of product and service and organisations gaining competitive advantage by turning just-in-time knowledge from customers into just-in-time learning for their organisation. However, despite the growing prevalence of customer involvement in service design and delivery, many organisations still see a distinction between "producer" and "customer" roles and therefore miss the rich opportunities presented through customer-centred value creation (Vargo et al, 2008).

Embracing a collaborative approach to service design and development requires a "democratisation and decentralisation of value creation" (Ramaswamy & Gouillart, 2010, p. 7) with focus shifting from inside-in ways of working where organisations concentrate on their perception of what customer's value to outside-in approaches which see direct engagement with customers in value definition, service or product design and delivery. In co-creative organisations, the value of customer experience is recognised and used to inform all aspects of the organisational construct. The increasing role of customers has gained growing prominence within local government with co-creation very much focused on shifting power and rethinking the role of state and communities. Failing to engage those customers and communities receiving services introduces inefficiency into ways of working as the intellectual skills and capabilities of those served are not effectively harnessed.

Meijer et al (2012, p. 13) define open government as "…the extent to which citizens can monitor and influence government processes through access to government information and access to decision-making processes". Practitioners have long sought to balance the principles of open government with the need to deliver efficient and cost effectives services. This challenge has been explored extensively in extant literature with theorists exploring differing approaches to more participative approaches to service design and delivery together with associated benefits and challenges (see table 3).

Pratchett (1999) sees the rationale for customer involvement in local governance as being both instrumental, as citizen participation increases organisational efficiency and effectiveness, and normative, as participation is good for democratic governance. This view is echoed by Cooper et al (2006) who see participative approaches as benefitting both customer and government through increased customer efficacy, competence and trust whilst also improving government responsiveness and legitimacy. King et al (1998, p. 3) see authentic participation as being positive and actively endorse the view that citizen involvement in administrative processes can have a positive "effect on the situation". However, Timney (2015) suggests that whilst citizen participation is more prominent it has had no more of an impact on government efficiency, a view supported by Kennedy (2007) who argues that citizen participation increases inefficiency of decision-making processes as practitioners perceive citizens to not have the requisite expertise to address technical issues. Schumpeter (2010) takes this view a stage further suggesting that additional input from citizens in the government development process should be avoided where possible.

Author	Dimension addressed
Arnstein, 1969	A typology of eight levels of participation and "nonparticipation"

Checkoway & Kingsley, 1978	Identifies five questions around the impact of participation on government decisions and policy outcomes
Mills & Morris, 1986	Advanced academic thinking around the role of clients as "partial" employees of service organisations including the definition of a model of client / customer participation.
Bitner et al, 1997	Identifies three roles customers play in service experiences – productive resource, contributor and competitor
Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004	Proposes the model for improved engagement with customers to enable better outcomes. The four stage DART model consisting dialogue (D), access (A), risk (R) and transparency (T)
Roberts, 2004	Provides a definition of seven models of administration and the roles that citizens and administrators are expected to play.
Cooper, Bryer, & Meek, 2006	Proposes a model for citizen-centred collaborative public management underpinned by principles of government trust, citizen efficacy, citizen trust, citizen competence, government responsiveness and government legitimacy.
Buckwalter, 2014	Defined a framework for citizen participation which connected structures and processes with the impact of direct citizen involvement.
Eisingerich et al, 2014	Advocates the value of two cooperative customer behaviours: customer participation and word of mouth. The impact of these behaviours are assessed with analysis suggesting both factors have to be in play to positively impact the customer experience.

Timney, 2015	Defines a graduated scorecard to rate differing models of citizen participation covering level of involvement in public processes and decision-making.

Table 3. Customer participation frameworks drawn from extant literature.

Citizen participation can take many forms ranging from the passive whereby "public officials are exclusively charged with responsibility for designing and providing services to citizens, who in turn only demand, consume and evaluate them" (Pestoff, 2006, p. 506), to one where citizens are empowered to affect the design and outcome of services and processes.

This research considers three academic frameworks as these provide varying levels of participation with focus placed on level of involvement, power and resultant decision-making. The graduated nature of these frameworks is particularly relevant given the practitioner perspective being adopted within this research and the need to focus on defining meaningful insight as to the level at which customers (human agency) is involved in the design and delivery of services. The three frameworks considered include: Arnstein's ladder of participation (1969) and involvement, Bitner et al's (1997) levels of participation and Timney's (2015) graduated scorecard.

For Arnstein (1969), meaningful participation can only occur when there is a redistribution of power. Without this, participation is perceived to be nothing more than an empty process, which frustrates the powerless. Arnstein (1969) classified participation according to levels of citizen power in determining products and outcomes but did so in a relatively simplistic manner which failed to recognise the complexities of power and any acknowledgement that social actors may act otherwise in any given situation (Giddens, 1985; Laverack, 2016). The typology of eight levels are viewed as a ladder to demonstrate graduations of

citizen participation. The first two rungs are Manipulation and Therapy and represent levels of non-participation. At this level, control lies with government and participation is used to educate citizens, helping them to adopt different perspectives and are disabused of incorrect attitudes (Stewart, 2007). The next three rungs depict tokenism and include Informing, Consultation, and Placation. At this level, citizens may be heard but decision-making control is retained by the governing authority. The top three rungs represent a level where citizens attain a degree of power. At this level, there is scope for citizens to Partner with decision-makers or have Delegated Power or full Citizen Control. For (Arnstein, 1969, p. 3) this is where the "have-nots" obtain decision-making authority or responsibility for service design (policy) and delivery. As one progresses up the ladder, power passes from one party to another. Cooper et al, (2006) describe this as an "equation" where citizen's gain power whilst the government loses power. The ladder can be seen to over-simplify the complexity of provider–user relationships (Bovaird, 2007; Laverack, 2016), however, whilst the typology does seek to directly compare opposing views of the powerless, "have-nots" with the "powerful", this simplistic distinction is deliberately intended to demonstrate the opposing perspectives of the "have-nots" who see a bureaucratic "system" and the power holders who see a homogenous "sea of ... people" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 3). Whilst deliberatively provocative, this approach fails to recognise the "transformative capacity" inherent within each of us and our ability to influence events even when power is perceived to lie elsewhere (Giddens, 1985, p. 7).

The second framework involves three levels of participation: low, moderate and high (Bitner et al, 1997). Low levels of participation require the citizen to be present to invoke service delivery. Within the context of local government, this may involve the citizen reporting a missed bin collection or faulty streetlight. Any action required after this point lies with the local authority and any contractors commissioned to complete works on their behalf. This presupposing of structure and agency aligns with Giddens (1997) duality of structure whereby these low level

interactions both enable and constrain human agency but can only do so in the "generating moment" between agent and social practice (Giddens, 1979, p. 5). Moderate levels of participation require citizen input for service creation to occur with needs assessment for benefits or social care falling in to this remit as the citizen is required to provide information pertinent to their specific circumstances for the service to be invoked. Higher level participation sees citizens co-creating the service product or outcome. Within this context, the local authority cannot effectively deliver a service without involvement of the citizen. Services within this category involve primary and secondary education, training and reablement which focuses on helping people to do things themselves rather than having things done for them (CSED, 2009). For higher level participation to succeed with organisation and citizen realising anticipated benefits, the service being co-created needs to be fit for purpose for the cohort of citizens engaged and citizens have to actively participate in service creation and delivery (Yi et al, 2011)

The final model provides a graduated scorecard which rates different methods of citizen participation based on the level of involvement that citizens have and their role in the decision-making process (Timney, 2015). The scorecard consists of three levels of participation including passive, collaborative and active. The passive stage involves information provision but very little in the way of collaboration or partnership ways of working as Timney (2015) suggests that this would result in the agency losing control. At this level, government organisations have "symbolic power and … control over public discourse" (Dijk, 1998, p. 13-14). This perspective aligns with Arnstein's (1969) view of the haves and have nots and can be seen as an oversimplification as power is perceived to be something binary which one possesses or not. Laverack (2016, p. 11) provides a different continuum consisting "power-from-within, power-over and power-with" thereby recognising the complexity of power relationships and a realisation that human agency does not comfortably sit within predetermined social constructs or the perception of such phenomena. Issues presented in the passive state in relation to ways of

acting, interacting, styles and voices are managed from the perspective of government with citizens having limited opportunity to converse in two-way dialogue (Fairclough, 2010). The next layer involves what Timney (2015) terms the collaborative network paradigm (CNP) whereby the balance of decision-making power between agency and customer is increasingly harmonised. For meaningful collaboration to exist, participants must have space to iteratively discuss issues and phenomena in an open forum which isn't constrained by time, structure, process or perceptions of power from either agency or customer. The final stage of the scorecard is active in which decision making is delegated from agency to public groups thereby putting in place the platform for customers to make decisions about government service design and delivery. One could argue that this final framework is an evolution of the ladder of participation as whilst it provides a graduated scorecard of citizen participation methods, the classification of Passive can be mapped to Arnstein's Non-Participation with Timney's Collaborative and Active levels aligned to Control.

2.5 Summary

The conclusion that can be drawn from the above literature review is that whilst local authorities have long sought to improve engagement through progressive devolution of power and influence to customers, the mechanisms used to date fall short of providing the requisite level of insight and participation needed to align provision with need and expectation. The literature has shown that whilst the role of customers is becoming an ever pressing issue as budgetary constraints cut deeper and successive governments have increasingly focused on customer participation as a way of improving service provision whilst increasing democratic accountability, there is little evidence of consistent and common understanding across local government of the ways in which customers and communities are engaged or can be encouraged to participate. Whilst there has been a notable level of academic research on related topics spanning co-production, co-governing, and

public engagement, there has been limited research on the practitioner's perspective of customer involvement in the design and delivery of local government services particularly within a contact centre environment.

Considering this backdrop, one naturally questions the differing perceptions of "customer", how customers are engaged within the context of local government service design and delivery, the benefits that participative approaches can help realise and how customers and communities can be empowered in meaningful ways? In seeking to answer these questions, it is evident that literature directly relating to the local government sector is particularly limited and even when considering a sector-neutral stance, there was a limited range of literature which provided insight on the practical application of participative theory and social action, particularly when considering the practitioner lens and their perspective of such phenomena.

In seeking to make sense of the differing terms used to describe and understand "customers" within a local government context, it was evident that consumerist discourse and its increasing prevalence as a result of the NPM movement had led to the use of a plethora of terms which were used interchangeably with limited consensus across academic literature as to meaning of the term and the nature of the role of that particular social actor. Contemporary consumerism was seen to have shifted from negative perceptions of excess (Gabriel & Lang, 2006; Clarke et al, 2007; Farrell, 2010; Crook & Wood, 2014; Bovaird & Loeffler, 2014) to a more favourable view of customers and consumers who are increasingly seen as connected, informed and more active (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Corbett, 2014; Osborne et al, 2016; Lawler, 2016) demonstrating an increasing level of free will with little or no "social obligation" (Gabriel and Lang, 2015). The social movement associated with consumerist discourse increasingly aligned with Giddens' (1984) structuration theory whereby social actors have the ability to act in a primarily voluntaristic way, having the "capacity to act freely, behave in an

unconstrained way and make independent choices" (Bodolica et al, 2015, p. 19). Where citizens and consumers were once seen as passive in their interactions, the literature identified a growing recognition of the importance that customers can and do play in developing and delivering new products and services.

Whilst a growing body of literature was identified relating to consumerist discourse and the shifting nature of social actors, the application of social theory, and structuration theory specifically, to local government remains at a point of immaturity with limited practical examples of where these theories had been applied within an operational environment. That said, there is a plethora of literature, albeit somewhat dated in a number of instances, around how social structure and action can be viewed as a "mutually interacting duality" (Jones & Karsten, 2008, p. 129). With consumerist literature suggesting an increasing level of empowerment for customers, there were clear linkages to Giddens' structuration theory whereby actors demonstrated highly autonomous capabilities and an ability to act otherwise in any given socially constructed reality (Giddens, 1989). The capability to act freely was challenged extensively within extant literature with Archer (2010) arguing that Giddens' view led to a "systematic underplaying of constraints" resulting in an artificial inflation of an actor's "freedom for action". The differing perspectives on action, constraint and the resultant outcomes in terms of a recursive creation of social structures do not go sufficiently far in examining the role of agency and their interpretative processes, thereby leaving a clear research gap for progression through this research (Englund and Gerdin, 2014).

Social action has been identified as a key issue within extant literature particularly when considering the development of social structures and the broader construction of language and associated discourse. The connection between language and practice for Giddens results in a notion of social praxis with actors constructing a social world and structure through action and interpretation

(Giddens, 1981). This communication of meaning represents a golden thread within structuration theory but has resulted in a level of challenge for its often macro level of abstraction and the absence of any detail on the impact of normative regulation on achieving collective consensus at point of interaction (McLennan, 1984; Stones, 2001; Bryant and Jary, 2011). However, as Collins (1981) and Mennell (1998) argue, an actor's sense of self and structure are created within complex interdependent networks which consist of both micro and macro phenomena. Whilst differing perspectives exist as to the level of free-will that human agency can exercise, with or without constraint (Giddens, 1984; Bourdieu, 1998; Thompson, 1989; Giddens, 1989; Bryant and Jary, 2001; Stones, 2005; Archer, 2010; Bodolica et al, 2015; Giddens & Sutton, 2017), the real world is naturally fraught with complexity and making sense of whether social action is constrained or enabled by a duality of structure is yet to be consistently demonstrated through empirical research. As this programme of study is concerned with perspectives on role, the micro view, including any enabling or constraining factors, is key in understanding practitioner perspectives of customer role and its impact on structure and outcome.

Power and the degree of power that social actors have in their interactions represents a consistent theme throughout the literature. Consumerist discourse has resulted in a challenge of "paternalistic powers" of the professions and resulted in greater demand for services which reflect the needs and wants of customers served (Clarke et al, 2007; Malpass et al, 2007). However, the shift from a perception of passivity to social reflexivity isn't viewed favourably by Corbett (2014) who argued that it had resulted in a devaluing of politics and governance. As power has shifted to customers, organisations have had to respond by embracing more flexible and agile approaches to service design and delivery (Pateman, 1970; Ostrom and Ostrom, 1977; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2000, Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Peters, 2008; Parrado et al, 2013; Mustak et al, 2014). Whilst there is limited insight as to the positive impact of such cultural and

structural changes, Graf (2007) and McShane and Sabadoz (2015) argue that the interface between customer, employee and organisation has blurred resulting in role conflict and ambiguity. This ambiguity is evident within the differing definitions of power and what it means within social constructs. Whilst Giddens (1985) talks of power in the sense of "transformative capacity", he fails to offer any detail around what this means in practice and how one might make sense of the nature through which power manifests itself practically within an operational environment (Bryant and Jary, 2001). Laverack (2016, p. 11) does however offer three perspectives on power including, "power-from-within, power-over and power-with", which provide a more digestible and useful continuum through which power can be explained within social constructs and demonstrates a depth of detail lacking within Giddens work.

It is against this context that structuration theory provides a theoretical framework through which phenomena comprising social structure and action can be examined. As actors interact with social structures, these actions result in a recursive creation and re-creation of "larger institutions" (Giddens and Pierson, 1998, p. 76), underpinned by rules and resources which determined the "rule-following activity of human actors" within these socially created phenomena (Porpora, 1989, p. 351). This recursive process of action and reaction is a critical component within structuration and a key consideration when considering social processes such as service design and delivery and the associated meaning social actors attribute to such activities and the relations of power so integral within these processes (Giddens, 1993). For such structures to have meaning, they cannot operate in isolation and their existence is dependent on "the communication of meaning, the exercise of power and the evaluation and judgement of conduct" (Giddens, 1977, p. 132) Within the context of this research, meaning attached to those labels used within practitioner discourse on the concept of customer, perspectives on roles, interaction between social actors, power at play within differing actor groups , interpretation and attributed meaning to actions and

reactions are critical considerations within this programme of study with structuration theory thereby providing a wholly applicable theoretical frame through which social constructs can be explored, perspectives of practitioners examined and the role of customers understood. Whilst the abstract nature of structuration theory has been criticised (Archer, 2010), structuration provides a theoretical frame through which the constitution of actors and practice can be examined at both an abstract and granular level (Giddens, 1984) and through which the "hierarchical and onion-like system-within-system nature of complex social wholes" can be examined in a systematic manner (Mouzelis, 1993, p. 24).

The rationale for customer involvement in local governance is apparent within academic literature, however, there are differing perspectives on the value to which such approaches bring to both customer and government. Cooper (2006) argues that customer participation can result in increased customer efficacy, competence and trust whilst simultaneously improving governance responsiveness and legitimacy. However, Timney (2015) argues that whilst there's increased recognition of the nature of customer participation with a number of frameworks identified within extant literature, its impact on government efficiency is limited. Schumpeter (2010) takes this view a step further arguing that where possible customer input in the government development process should be avoided.

2.5.1 Gaps in the Literature

A review of extant literature on the role of customers in local government design and delivery has identified a number of limitations in the breadth and depth of existing empirical research. Whilst consumerist discourse has evidently moved thinking forward, there remain a plethora of terms and definitions used to describe "customers" both within the context of local government and wider sectors. Available literature is largely theoretical with limited evidence of empirical

research on the role of customers and the impact that they have on the design and delivery of services. With such differing perspectives on the nature of "customers" and limited evidence of practitioner perspectives on the nature of customers and the intersect between agency and structure, a clear gap in extant academic thought is apparent. This research is intended to provide a practitioner perspective on the differing terms used to describe "customers" and how practitioners make sense of the terms both in relation to role and involvement in designing and delivering local government services.

Social action and the intersect between agency and structure represents an area which has been discussed extensively within extant literature, however, empirical research incorporating Giddens' structuration theory is limited with Englund and Gerdin (2014) arguing that studies to date have focused on structures with a relative failure to examine the role of agency. Whilst Giddens himself identifies a number of studies, there was limited evidence of the practical application of structuration theory within the local government sector. Whilst there is much discussion around the components of structuration and criticisms as to the often abstract nature of these principles and level to which human agency is constrained or enabled through a process of structuration, current literature does not provide sufficient reference points through which insight can be gained as to the role of social actors or human agency within socially constructed realities involving service design and delivery. This research aims to explore the principles of structuration theory within the context of practitioner perspective of the roles of social actors in the design and delivery of local government services.

Whilst structuration theory can be seen to view structures and agents at an abstract or conceptual layer, Stones (2007, p. 7-8) argues that this generalist perspective can be helpful then considering both "ontology in general" and "ontology in situ" thereby considering and addressing the perceived gap between the philosophical and the practical dimensions of structuration. Within the context

of this research, understanding the macro and micro perspectives is particularly relevant as one seeks to understand sector-wider practitioner perspectives on the role of customers on contact centre service design and delivery complemented by micro-level insights as to the impact of such approaches. This perspective of structuration theory very much aligns with Elias' (1939) theory of figuration whereby social constructs are created and re-created through social processes made up of micro and macro phenomena.

The rationale for involving customers in local governance is debated within current literature with theorists having conflicting perspectives on the relative strengths and weaknesses of such approaches. With much of the literature lacking practical examples of where participative theories and approaches have been operationalised within the intersect of customers and local authorities, the insights and arguments do not provide the requisite level of currency and insight to help develop and move forward professional practice. This research seeks to critically analyse the lived experiences of practitioners charged with designing and delivering local government contact centre services and the impact of customer involvement in this process will be investigated through this programme of study.

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research philosophy, theoretical perspective, approach, methodology and techniques to be used within the context of this programme of study together with justification for their selection. In approaching academic research one must have clarity of thought around philosophical issues as this provides perspective on how knowledge is constructed, the reality through which knowledge can be understood, the researcher's reflexive role in the process and the methods through which knowledge can be gathered, analysed and interpreted (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Easterby-Smith et al, 2015). In defining the intended research methodology and associated data collection techniques, the researcher has considered differing epistemological, ontological and theoretical perspectives.

The chapter includes five sections with section one setting out a critical review of research philosophies; section two sets out the research approach; section three critically evaluates the research methodology for this programme of research; section four sets out the data collection methods employed during this research; and section five summarises the research methodology.

3.2 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy is concerned with the examination of concepts and the need to understand phenomena through the application of a set of assumptions or underlying principles. Through an iterative cycle of assumption making and philosophical questioning during the research process, knowledge is developed and the nature of that knowledge understood (Saunders et al, 2016). Being aware of the assumptions one makes is critical as accepting them without conscious thought would adversely impact the research process (Neuman, 2011).

Epistemology is concerned with how knowledge is made, what is required to produce knowledge and what it looks like once it is developed (Stokes & Wall, 2014; Neumann, 2011). During the research process, it is imperative that one actively questions "how, why and when any knowledge came into being and was accepted as valid" (Stokes & Wall, 2014). Approaching the research through the lens of structuration theory, Giddens (1979) argues that the duality of structure and agency exist in the "generating moment" thereby implying that knowledge isn't there awaiting discovery but is rather "condition and consequence" of that duality with socially constructed phenomena apparent at that specific point in time (Giddens, 1993). Consistent with Giddens's (1979) thoughts, the nominalist position assumes that observation does not result in the production of knowledge as knowledge is formed through opinions, narrative, attributed meaning and subjective interpretation. (Neuman, 2011; Saunders et al, 2016).

Essentially, we know what we know through an iterative cycle of action whereby social structures are created and re-created with the associated "rule-following activity of human actors" determined through recursive sense-making (Porpora, 1989, p. 351). As the research is approached through the lens of structuration, understanding the differing practitioner perspectives of "customer" and their role in local government service design and delivery, knowledge will be developed through enculturation, whereby the researcher gains insight iteratively on social constructed phenomena and the perceived value that practitioners place on the role of customers within these social constructs (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011).

Ontology is concerned with the nature and status of social reality (Gill and Johnson, 2011). The ontological stance associated with this research aligns with Giddens view that the reality of social interactions and their purpose are secured through relationality of actors within a given social setting and context (Hatch, 2013). This view is echoed by Archer (1996, p. 97-98) who argued an 'inseparability' between structure and practice whereby structural properties have "efficacy by courtesy of

agents". Agents are not constrained by this inseparability rather their actions, both rational and reflexively ordered, must be the focus (Giddens, 1993). Understanding what motivates social actors their ideas, values, beliefs desires and ultimately social practice is critical to this research thereby meaning that the realist ontology would not be appropriate (Wodak & Meyer, 2009; Giddens & Sutton, 2013; Elliot, 2014). In contrast, relativist ontology sees reality as being socially constructed through observation (Stokes & Wall, 2014; Saunders et al, 2016). The world is not "out there" but always occurring around us, made up of interpretation and subjectivity (Neuman, 2011). As the research aim is focused on understanding practitioner perspectives of the role that customers place within the intersect between agency and structure, the relativist stance and its assertion that realities are reliant on individual persons for form and content is therefore more aligned (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). From this stance, the social reality being studied will be formed through the lived experience of those practitioners engaged and interviewed during the research process.

3.2.1 Theoretical Perspective

Positivism is used extensively within business research and assumes that the world is made up of observable, measurable facts. Research is undertaken in a value free, atomistic way and must be quantifiable, so as to allow valid law-like generalisations to be produced (Neuman, 2011). The organised nature of positivism sees clear separation between facts and values, with focus placed on how these facts can be tested through the development of theoretical frameworks and associated data capture and analysis. This iterative cycle of knowledge development enables generalisable causal laws to be defined and through which scientific phenomena explained (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The nature of human interactions in service-based organisations can be chaotic and with the unpredictability of political, economic, social and technological factors, law-like

generalisations made today may not hold true at future points in time. The ontological position underpinning this programme of research is based not on law-like cause and effect (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), but rather a stance involving practitioner perspectives of context-specific interactions which are informed by the relationality of actors which are not subject to generalisations shaping their actions and reactions.

In contrast to positivism, the interpretivist epistemology attempts to provide understanding of events through the "lived experience of human beings" (Cavana et al, 2001, p. 9) and social phenomena constructed through action and interaction of human actors (Blaikie, 2011). Where objective investigation of phenomena in the natural world may be sufficient to inform the development of factual generalisations, Weber argued that social science required more than observation and needed to consider understanding or verstehen (Neuman, 2011). In seeking to understand practitioner perspectives of the role of customers at the intersect between agency and structure, context and attributed meaning are pivotal when considering such perspectives of these socially created constructs. Where positivism seeks to produce generalised law-like rules, this research is focused on the subjective meaning humans attach to specific actions and how that impacts the actions of others (Blaikie, 2011). As this research is focused on understanding both macro and micro level practitioner perspectives, structuration theory provides a frame through which the "reciprocal relationship between agency and structure" can be examined (O'Boyle, 2013, p. 1020) with practitioner's attributed meaning to structure and action analysed in a considered manner (Giddens, 1993, p. 4). It is this meaning that is so critical in understanding the differing roles apparent within a local government environment and the action that actors take in relation to others. This theoretical perspective aligns with the interpretivist epistemology where understanding, context and meaning are explored and examined. In adopting an interpretivist stance, which can bring the researcher closer to action and social action which data-driven methods may not capture (Szmigin & Foxall,

2000), one needs to be mindful of the potential scope for personal sentiment to creep in thereby eroding any perception that interpretive research is "scientific" and increased scope for research bias to occur thereby eroding the trustworthiness of the research (Calder & Tybout, 1987; Parahoo, 2014).

3.3 Research approach

Research strategies provides the link between research philosophy and methods (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Easterby-Smith et al, 2015) and can be seen as the plan and associated logic for developing new knowledge and insight (Blaikie, 2011). Selecting an appropriate research strategy is a critical component in the research journey as the research strategy provides the mechanism through which the research objectives can be answered (Blaikie, 2011). Analysis of extant literature has identified three research strategies including: deductive, inductive and abductive, which will be explored further within the context of this research (Blaikie, 2011; Stokes & Wall, 2014; Saunders et al, 2016).

Deduction is typically associated with positivist methodologies and involves the development of theoretical constructs which are subsequently tested through empirical observation of facts "out there" in the field (Gill & Johnson, 2011; Stokes, 2011). Deduction involves the definition of causal or law-like relationships through a process of operationalisation whereby researchers attempt to falsify their theoretical construct through rigorous testing (Saunders et al, 2016). For Popper, theories that have not been subject to falsification cannot be scientific nor can they be used to inform generalisability (Popper, 1961). From a relativist perspective, reality is socially constructed through the relationality of actors and cannot be predicted nor is it appropriate to subject it to processes of falsification.

As interpretation and subjectivity are critical when considering the thoughts and perspectives of actors within socially constructed phenomena (Giddens, 1993; Neuman, 2011; Hatch, 2013), seeking to determine causal or law-like relationships within such phenomena which can be tested through empirical observation of fact is incongruent with the underpinning of structuration theory and not appropriate to this programme of study. Within the context this research, as one is seeking to understand perspectives of practitioners within the field of service design and delivery, the development of theoretical constructs or hypotheses in advance of data collection processes would therefore not be appropriate.

Induction can be seen as a counter view to deduction and involves the development of theoretical constructs following observation, data collection and extensive analysis (Hempel, 1966; Blaikie, 2011, Gill & Johnson, 2011). These theoretical constructs are developed, tested and grounded in iterative interpretation of observable experiences. Where deduction favours objectivity, inductivist approaches are concerned with subjectivity and how actors within social settings make sense of actions and experiences (Stokes, 2011; Easterby-Smith et al, 2015). Such processes represent critical underpinnings of structuration theory which provides a frame through which social structures can be viewed, not as independent and conflicting elements, but as a mutually interacting duality" (Jones & Karsten, 2003, p. 5). Seeking to understand this social logic is key to the inductive approach particularly where researchers seek to formulate new theoretical constructs from the ground up (Neuman, 2011). Consistent with the relativist perspective, inductive approaches are made up of interpretation and subjectivity therefore the researcher has to consider the role that they play in the data collection, analysis and interpretation critical within this approach. As the researcher is seeking to understand practitioner perspectives on the role of customers in local government service design and delivery, as data is captured, analysed and interpreted, one will have to ensure rigor throughout with sufficient

context and background provided to allow the reader to make an informed assessment of the reliability and validity of the researching findings (Stokes, 2011).

Where deduction involves the development of theoretical constructs which are subsequently tested through empirical observation of facts and induction is concerned with the development of theory through data collection, analysis and interpretation, abduction moves iteratively between theory and empirical reasoning thereby drawing on both deduction and induction (Patton, 2002; Saunders et al, 2016). For Peirce (1998), abduction involves the premise of hypotheses on probation whereby the initial theoretical construct is conceived or created through observation and analysis of "the meanings and interpretations, the motives and intentions, that people use in their everyday lives and which direct their behaviour" (Blaikie, 2011, p. 89). These hypotheses are given a "fair trial" and are valid until proven to be, beyond all reasonable doubt, true or false (Peirce, 1998). Abductive reasoning is applicable at differing levels of complexity ranging from low-level problem solving through to more complex organisational issues and involves reflection-in-action whereby learning and knowledge is derived and confirmed through a process of discovery (Schon, 1991).

The adoption of an interpretive approach means that application of a deductive research strategy whereby theories are constructed and law-like relationships defined through rigorous testing is not wholly appropriate when seeking to adopt an "inside-out" approach to research and through which social reality is constructed through multiple perspectives of social actors (Willis et al, 2007). The adoption of induction whereby descriptions of phenomena emerge through, data collection and interpretation and abduction where theoretical constructs are conceived through observation and tested through reflection-in-practice. As these approaches are pivotal when considering the attributed meaning that practitioners place on socially constructed phenomena within processes of structuration, it is therefore more appropriate within the context of this research. As such, an

interpretive philosophy will be adopted with inductive approaches applied. Abduction will be applied to the development and testing of theoretical constructs focused on the role of customers in local government service design and delivery.

3.4 Research methodology

The research methodology was informed by the researcher's philosophy and strategy. As the researcher is seeking to understand customer role at the intersect of agency and structure in the design and delivery of local government services through the definition of a socially agreed understanding of action and social action, qualitative techniques will be adopted. Qualitative data collection techniques are helpful in providing meaning to complex and interrelated concepts. This approach is particularly useful as extant literature is limited on this area of study. The exploratory nature of qualitative methods means that respondent motivations, values and attitudes can be captured, probed and assessed during the data collection and analysis processes. Applying multiple techniques provides increased scope for triangulation to take place, which is particularly helpful within socially constructed environments consisting of differing perspectives. Adopting such an approach is anticipated to increase scope for triangulation to take place and through which one can "produce a more complete, holistic and contextual portrait of the object under study" (Ghauri, 2005, p. 222).

3.4.1 Researcher Reflexivity

In assessing potential research methods, attention was placed on reflexivity and how this would affect the researcher's role, methods, values, biases, engagement and interaction with research participants and in turn the potential impact on social knowledge and insight generated during the research process (Mason, 1996; Stokes, 2011; Bryman & Bell, 2015).

It is argued that researchers get drawn into the field of study and are therefore implicated in knowledge creation processes through active construction of interpretations which can allow "ideological interpretations" or bias to affect the application of chosen research methods and the resultant findings (Hertz, 1997; Silverman, 2011). Practitioner researchers must therefore address how tacit knowledge and identity can impact the choices made as both researcher and author during the research journey (Reed, 1995; Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Deconstructive reflexivity is associated with the interpretivist epistemology and involves the researcher "decentring" himself from the written word thereby removing potential for reader fixation on the author's voice and in turn allowing multiple perspectives to appear (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The researcher must be aware of one's own point in time experiences, values and bias, how these influences are surfaced and their potential impact on the research project communicated (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004).

Recognising the researcher's prior role in helping local authorities to design and deliver services to customers, focus has been placed on the process of critical reflection both in relation to how the research is conducted and knowledge generated. Reflexive notes have been maintained to record personal reflections during the research journey and facilitate a process of self-awareness thereby seeking to improve the quality and validity of research (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004; Easterby-Smith, 2015).

3.4.2 Case Study Strategy

Case studies provide an opportunity through which in-depth qualitative assessment and analysis of a research study can be undertaken and through which "phenomena and their dynamics" can be understood (Gill & Johnson, 2011, p. 225). Whilst the case study method has been used extensively in qualitative and quantitative research, perceptions around an absence of rigour in case study

selection and approach can result in large amounts of data being generated thereby allowing multiple interpretations to be made (Gill & Johnson, 2011; Easterby-Smith et al, 2015). Pettigrew (1990, p. 281) describes this situation as "death by data asphyxiation" with case studies being particularly prone to issues associated with sheer volumes of data being generated. Eisenhardt (1989) argues a different perspective suggesting that volume of data is not necessarily the issue but rather the ability of the individual to process information and draw meaningful conclusions. Consistent with this assertion, Yin (2013) argues that risks associated with the case study method can be minimised through clarity of design prior to data collection processes commencing. Easterby-Smith et al (2015, p. 55) argue that this design should cover the "proposition, unit of analysis, link between data and proposition and procedure for the interpretation of data". Consistent with Easterby-Smith et al's (2015) assertion and in line with Giddens' theory of structuration, the case study within this research is focused around a clear proposition which relates to practitioner perspectives of the role of customers in the design and delivery of contact centres within a local government environment, the focus of which is underpinned by clear research objectives.

Yin (2014) identified two distinct classifications of case studies, a single case vs a multiple case. A single case is best used in unique situations (Saunders et al, 2016), however, because this approach does not allow for comparisons to be made across different organisations within the local government sector, the applicability of this method for the focus of this research is questionable. In contrast, Yin (2014) argues that multiple case studies are preferable as the replication of case study methods can provide a richer body of insight and achieve greater generalisability of theory. Ghauri (2004) further suggests that multiple case studies can assist in identifying variations within phenomena studied thereby allowing for comparisons to be made and conclusions drawn. However, Patton (1990) suggests that the sample size is less important than the criteria used to select cases with a smaller group in many instances providing sufficient information to draw meaningful

conclusions. With this research focused on the knowledgeable agent or practitioner within structuration theory, adopting a focused approach to case study design which seeks to perspectives and attributed meaning that social actors place on the phenomenon being studied rather than institutional or structural analysis, the scope for insights informed by "utility and richness of the information content provided" should be maximised (Gill & Johnson, 2011, p. 226). As the researcher is not undertaking quantitative research, application of a precise number of metrics across a statistically significant number of cases is therefore not relevant nor is it applicable when seeking to examine social perspectives, rather, the selection of a smaller number of cases which allow the acquisition of "in-depth knowledge and astute insight" is more useful within the context of this study (Neuman, 2011, p. 179) and is the approach taken within this research. Specific phenomena have been identified around a core set of research objectives which seek to provide insight and understanding of practitioner perspectives of the participative role of customers in service design and delivery within a local government setting and the impact that they have on such processes including benefit derivation through co-creation of value.

Consistent with the assertions above, case study research can be problematic if there isn't coherence around the rationale for case study selection (Pettigrew, 1990; Gill & Johnson, 2011; Easterby-Smith et al, 2015). As this research is focused on understanding practitioner perspectives of customer role in contact centre service design and delivery within the local government sector, exploring the "how" and "why" of contemporary practice and associated social phenomena with no requirement for behavioural control means that the case study method is wholly advantageous (Yin, 2014). With focus placed on practitioner perspectives, the case study approach allows a range of perspectives to be captured around participative role of customers, their impact and value created through such processes.

In line with Yin's (2013) perspective, the first step undertaken in the research process was the identification of clear and unambiguous research objectives unp. Leveraging insight from extant literature and adopting an iterative approach, a general research area was initially identified through experiential practice which was subsequently distilled down to a smaller number of well-defined research objectives thereby ensuring clarity around what the researcher was seeking to achieve (Campbell et al, 1982; Robson, 2002). Applying these objectives back to the differing research methods further validated the applicability of a case study approach particularly given the researcher's intention to provide meaning and context to often abstract perspectives in the design and delivery of contact centre services within the local government sector (Easterby-Smith et al, 2015).

3.4.3 Sample Selection

Organisational documentation in the form of customer-centred strategies were sought from one hundred and fifty seven local authorities within England spanning single tier, upper tier and metropolitan organisational constructs (LGiU, 2017). These organisations provide either all Council services or services including social care and local education which typically require a notable level of customer participation. Forty-four strategies were subsequently accessed via each organisation's website and analysed. Figure 2 sets out the sample including the make-up of the differing organisational constructs:

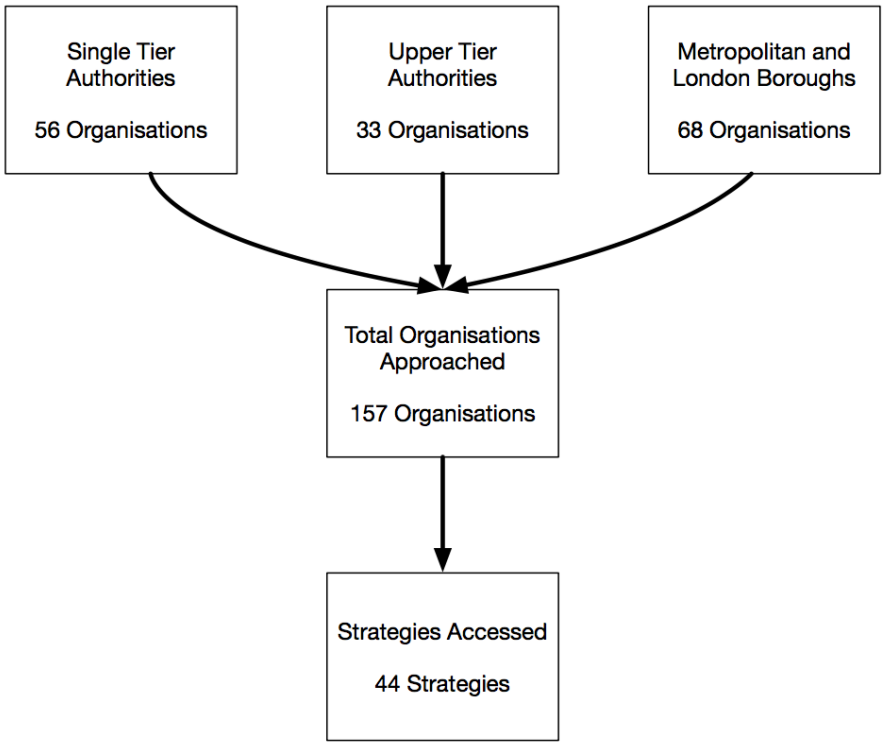

Figure 2: Sample and make-up of local authorities engaged

Research participants for semi-structured interviews were selected from across the local government sector using non-probability sampling techniques (Saunders et al, 2016). As the research is focused on providing an understanding of practitioner perspectives of the role of customers in local government contact centre service design and delivery, purposive sampling was undertaken whereby the researcher expressed judgement, informed by professional experience, as to the selection of participants based on prior knowledge of their professional characteristics and experience within contact centre disciplines (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010; Bryman & Bell, 2015; Saunders et al, 2016). Participants were selected based on their experience of and involvement in the design and delivery of local government contact centre services.

In determining the optimum sample size for purposive sampling, one should ideally seek to achieve data saturation whereby the researcher collects and analyses data to a point that no new insights are captured (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010), however, Sandelowski, (1995) argued that depth of data capture during a case study may be adversely impacted if the sample size is too great. As the research is approached from an interpretivist perspective with focus placed on understanding or verstehen, context, perspective and attributed meaning of social phenomena rather than law-like generalisations are intended outcomes thereby negating the need for a statistically representative sample. Twenty four participants were invited to take part in the research, with seventeen subsequently being interviewed.

In selecting the sample for this research, a cross-sectional design approach was adopted as the focus of this study is concerned with practitioner perspectives of customer role at the intersect between customer and local government at a given point in time rather than seeking to explain observed patterns over time (Easterby-Smith et al, 2015). Whilst longitudinal approaches were considered, the contemporary nature of the topic, the researcher's experience operating across the local government sector and issues related to access to busy practitioners suggested greater value would be derived from a cross-sectional approach.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

The primary data collection methods employed during this research involve the collation of organisational strategy documentation and completion of semi-structured interviews with a cross-section of practitioners from the local government sector.

Organisational documentation represents a key source of primary literature and can provide useful insight through which inferences can made or questions

identified which can in turn be explored through other data collection processes (Yin, 2014; Bryman & Bell, 2015; Saunders et al, 2016). With the focus of this study being on customer role in the design and delivery of local government contact centre services, accessing extant strategy documentation from across the sector provides a stable source of insight allowing a point in time view of the organisation's approach to customer participation and associated participative approaches. However, one must be mindful of potential limitations particularly related to the intended purpose and objectives of each paper and any associated bias (Yin, 2014). As organisational strategy documents provide a view on the role of customers including existing or planned participative approaches to service design and delivery, these therefore provide a critical point of insight through which data can be collected and analysed.

Interviews provide an opportunity to explore and uncover diverse information from individuals through either structured or semi-structured questioning. Using this approach accurate insight into an individual's perspective, experiences and particular thoughts on the subject matter being discussed can be gained. The nature of interviews mean that detailed questions can be asked, confusion or uncertainty clarified and areas of interest probed to ensure the right information is elicited during the session. However, this approach is time consuming, can be costly and ensuring consistency of approach across separate interviews can be problematic (Maylor & Blackmon, 2005). Without specific training and rigor, interviewer bias may affect the accuracy and validity of information captured and affect any subsequent inferences drawn. Interviews provide a means through which participants can provide rich and often descriptive insight and information (Yin, 2014; Stokes & Wall, 2014). For Silverman (2011), they provide a window into people's experiences, their narrative and the social world within which they live.

3.5.1 Interview Research Instrument Design

Prior to developing the interview research instrument, a review of extant literature was conducted which included:

- What or who constitutes a customer and how does this differ, if at all, to other terms such as consumer, citizen and service user (McLaughlin, 2009; Clayton, 2013; Bodolica et al, 2015)
- The evolution of customer roles from the 1970s to late 2010s (Hirschman, 1970; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2000; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Graf, 2007; Vargo and Lusch, 2008; Nambisan, 2008; Voima et al, (2010); Elg et al, 2012; Mukhtar et al, 2012; Edvardsson et al, 2013; Corbett, 2014; McShane & Sabadoz, 2015; Omar et al, 2016; Luu et al, 2018; Rihova et al, 2018)
- Social theory and the role of action in establishing social structure and practice (Orlikowski, 2000; Jones & Karsten 2008; Wodak & Meyer, 2009; Al Rawahi et al, 2016; Omar et al, 2016)
- Giddens theory of structuration with particular focus on the "activities and practice" of people within social systems (Giddens and Pierson, 1998, p. 76) and the "rules and resources" involved in the creation of social systems (Giddens, 1984, p. 25)
- Customer participation within the design and delivery of local government services (Arnstein, 1969; Checkoway & Kingsley, 1978; Mills & Morris, 1986; Bitner et al, 1997; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Roberts, 2004; Cooper et al, 2006; Buckwalter, 2014; Eisingerich et al, 2014; Timney, 2015)

Section 2.5 (p. 49) summarises the findings from the literature review and associated gaps. Figure 3 below sets out the approach taken to develop the research implement. Ensuring alignment to the aim and objective of the research, a review of extant literature was completed and following thematic analysis of

organisational strategy documentation a list of topics were defined which in turn informed the development of a draft set of interview questions. These questions were refined through initial testing of the interview instrument was undertaken with a finalised version developed (see Appendix 4, p. 174).

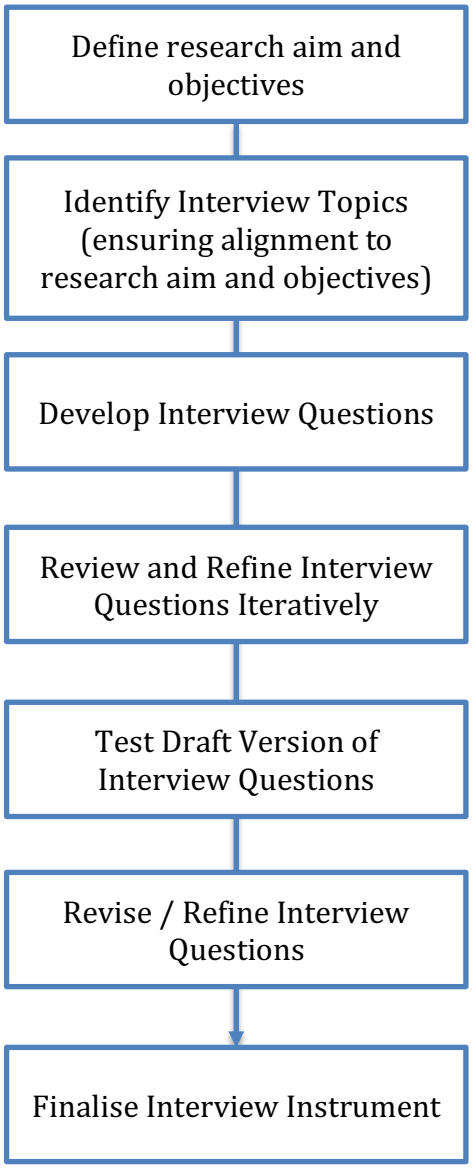

Figure 3. Approach to develop the interview instrument (adapted from Bryman and Bell, 2015)

Interview form was semi-structured but focused and consisted a number of fixed questions thereby ensuring structure to the approach (Stokes & Wall, 2014; Easterby-Smith, 2015). A conversational style was adopted during the interview to allow differing social realities or understanding of participants to be captured (Neuman, 2011, Saunders et al, 2016). The researcher operated at two levels throughout the interview process with open-ended questions intended to encourage open and "friendly" responses with probing completed to ensure that each line of enquiry was satisfied (Yin, 2014).

3.5.2 Interview Process

Prior to undertaking participant interviews, a protocol was developed to ensure effective progression of the interview process. The protocol included the following information:

- Research aim and objectives
- Process steps to be followed during the interview including preamble where confidentiality, consent and process were to be discussed with the participant
- The interview questions to be asked
- Areas to probe to help participants provide an appropriate level of detail within their response
- Process to close interview including discussion around next steps

Participants were provided with an informed consent form setting out the purpose of the study, why they have been invited to participate, the implications of taking part, potential benefits to them, permission to record the discussion and associated data processing standards.

Due to the geographic spread of participants and calendar availability, telephone interviews were employed. Each interview was semi-structured but focused with

interview questions derived from the review of extant literature and insight drawn from thematic analysis of organisational documents. Interview themes were provided to participants in advance thereby providing opportunity to prepare thus promoting increased scope for validity and reliability of responses (Easterby-Smith et al, 2015; Saunders et al, 2016). The researcher sought to achieve a conversational style with underlying structure supported by an open exchange of opinions with tone and style adapted to ensure flow (Neuman, 2011). Probing was used to encourage fuller responses or clarification to answers deemed to be ambiguous.

Each interview was digitally recorded to facilitate transcription and subsequent analysis. Contemporaneous notes were taken during each interview thereby allowing pertinent points to be recorded and the researcher's reflections to be captured particularly around relationships between themes for exploration during the analytical phase.

3.5.3 Thematic Analysis

Organisational documents and interview transcripts have been analysed using thematic analysis which involves the identification of implicit and explicit ideas, issues and discourse within defined bodies of data (Stokes, 2011). Thematic analysis is well suited to large datasets but can result in nuanced insights being missed (Guest et al, 2012). Codes were defined through identification of meaningful segments of text which in turn informed the development of relationships or meaning or themes (Guest et al, 2012). These themes were developed inductively and were used to shape the definition of interview questions employed within the semi-structured interviews.

Interviews were completed with practitioners operating at manager, head of service and director-level. The interviews were intended to provide a view of the experiences, narrative and social world of practitioners within a local government

context. Interviews were semi-structured with a number of fixed questions developed through thematic analysis of organisational strategy documents. Participants were encouraged to share their views and realities of each theme explored. The researcher was particularly keen to understand their lived experiences around the participative role customers play in service design and delivery.

Consistent with the approach set out in table 4, organisational documents and interview transcripts were repeatedly read to identify meaningful segments of text or themes. Applying descriptive meaning to identified themes, the researcher developed a codebook consisting of codes arranged into "categories, types and relationships of meaning" (Guest et al, 2012). Each code included a short descriptive label, a definition and guidance as to when to apply the code to ensure consistency of approach and application.

Phase	Process	Output
1	Read data to identify initial patterns. Repeat.	Initial codes identified and are accompanied by detailed notes.
2	Develop initial codes and define emerging patterns.	Defined codes which clearly address research objectives. Where codes are combined, the rationale for this is clearly articulated.
3	Group codes into themes that reflect the data. Clearly articulate the meaning of each theme. Identify gaps in the analysis.	Initial list of themes are developed.
4	Assess connection between themes, data and theoretical framework. Identify gaps	Themes are aligned to provide an effective narrative around the data.

	repeating phases 1-4 where required.	
5	Provide clear definition of each theme and specific attributes of each.	Clear definition of how the theme helps understand the data.
6	Define which themes provide a meaningful interpretation of the data and how this contributes to the theoretical framework.	A coherent description of the results including a meaningful explanation of the behaviour and context.

Table 4: Adapted from Braun & Clarke (2006) and Guest et al (2012)

The researcher used a qualitative data analytics tool, MAXQDA12, to facilitate development of the codebook. In selecting the MAXQDA software, NVivo and Atlas.ti were also considered, however, MAXQDA's user experience in terms of importing and coding of multiple file types and online support options made this the tool of choice for this research.

Through iterative development of the thematic codebook, the researcher sought to make sense of evidence captured and use this to "extend, revise and test" emerging thought (Ragin & Amoroso, 2011). The outputs of the analysis were presented as a clear and logical account of the narrative across themes with data extracts used to highlight specific insights. The analysis addressed both descriptive and interpretative levels with reference made to the research objectives and extant literature to reinforce salient points (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.5.4 Validity and reliability

Validity and reliability are argued to be equally as important for inductive, interpretivistic approaches as it is for deductive, positivistic research (Stokes &

Wall, 2014). However, one must ensure that the lens through which these principles is observed is consistent with the research philosophy and approach adopted. Validity is typically concerned with whether a researcher measures what was initially intended and the accuracy of results attained. To guide and assess the validity of approach taken within this research, four tests outlined within Yin (2014) will be applied.

The first test, construct validity, can create difficulty within case studies as ineffective measures and subjectivity can affect data collection approaches. Within this research, extensive effort has been invested to ensure effective definition of methods, objectivity of approach and clear linkages between theoretical constructs and the research methods intended to assess these. Aware of scope for researcher bias, particular attention has been paid to ensuring that sufficient samples were selected and that these were consistent with research aims as opposed to the author's preconceptions or academic thought on the subject matter (Miles & Huberman, 2013; Easterby-Smith et al, 2015). The use of multiple sources of information is helpful in further increasing validity of approach and key practitioners knowledgeable in the subject matter will be used to review and critique draft findings.

Internal validity is critical within the research as relationships between themes and resultant conclusions are sought. The structured, analytical approach adopted, is imperative in ensuring a robust approach to analysis underpins conclusions drawn. Where inferences are made, suitable data and insight must be available to support this or where logical connections are made, the rationale for which should be documented and available for review.

The third test assesses the extent to which results are generalisable. The focus of this research is based on securing an understanding of the role of customers in local government service design and delivery. Adopting an interpretivist

perspective, the researcher is concerned with securing insight on the lived experiences of practitioners engaged rather than generalisable, law-like results. That said, the researcher seeks to blend qualitative techniques to develop a theoretical framework which can contribute insight to extant literature and be used to further academic and professional practice (Becker, 1991).

Reliability represents the final test and is concerned with standardisation of research methods so that they may be repeated, with minimal error and bias (Yin, 2014). The use of semi-structured interviews and template analysis typically represent methods, which can be replicated, however, the qualitative nature of these approaches does impact scope for the same results to be attained through replication. That said, there is transparency in the research methods, design and data analysis processes employed within this study and these are accessible for audit and quality assurance purposes, thereby aiding any similar studies in the future (Easterby-Smith et al, 2015).

3.5.5 Limitations

The limitations of the research methods and associated design have been articulated within each of the appropriate sections. The research has been approached from an interpretivist perspective with focus placed on verstehen, context and meaning elicited during participant engagement rather than the definition of law-like generalisations. The researcher sought to achieve data saturation through an appropriate level of engagement with practitioners leading, managing and delivering operations and associated change within and across local government. Whilst the research may be viewed as limited due to the absence of a statistically significant sample, the research has provided valuable insight around the subjective meaning humans attach to social action within the intersect between customers and local government and how it is directed towards the actions of others that other data-driven methods may not have captured (Szmigin & Foxall, 2000; Blaikie, 2011, Easterby-Smith, 2015).

Participants were drawn from the researcher's professional network thereby allowing deep insight into the lived experiences of those individuals engaged during the research process. As the researcher had prior professional engagement with each participant during their respective programmes of transformational change and operational improvement activities, scope did exist for a level of researcher bias during the process. During thematic analysis, the researcher was mindful of scope for selective subjectivity to occur whereby insights or inferences were drawn based on the researcher's prior knowledge rather than that elicited during the research process (Easterby-Smith, 2015; Saunders et al, 2016).

3.5.6 Ethics

In seeking access to subjects and associated information, eight ethical concerns identified by Churchill (1990) affecting the researcher-participant relationship were considered and addressed. When approaching subjects no pressures was applied, an explanation provided as to the research aims and objectives and an indication of required input outlined. Prior to further engagement, consent to participate was attained.

To aid analysis and ensure accuracy of approach, interviews have been transcribed with a copy being provided to the subject for review and sign off. To reduce scope for possible participant stress, anonymity has been maintained and results of the analysis shared.

It is imperative that researcher objectivity is maintained throughout with particular focus being paid to ensure that "subjective selectivity" does not affect what is recorded during data collection and data analysis processes (Saunders et al, 2016). During the analytical phase, a rigorous cyclical approach to coding was undertaken thus ensuring that all relevant insights were captured during the thematic analysis thereby seeking to minimise scope for selectivity of insight.

3.6 Summary

This chapter has set out the research strategy and methods adopted in this programme of study. In considering the research philosophy, positivist and interpretivist paradigms were examined. Where positivism sees clear separation between facts and values, with focus placed on how these facts can be tested, interpretivism attempts to provide understanding of events through the "lived experience of human beings" (Cavana et al, 2001). Positivism is concerned with the definition of law-like generalisations with quantitative research methods leveraged to capture empirical data. As practitioner perspectives are critical to the research aims and objectives, this does not lend itself well to the positivist paradigm. An interpretivist stance leveraging thematic analysis of organisational strategy documentation and transcripts from semi-structured interviews provides a solid research footing from which the lived experiences of practitioners can be elicited, examined and analysed. As the research is focused on the role of customer at the intersect of agency of structure within a local government context, a case study approach was adopted with focus placed on that specific sector.

Within this chapter the relative advantages and disadvantages of the research methods, data collection and analytical approaches were critically evaluated and given the practitioner focus for this research, considerations relating to researcher reflexivity and potential issues around validity and selective subjectivity assessed and examined. Findings elicited from this research and associated conclusions are set out in the following chapters.

4 Research Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the results of the research, highlighting key findings from the methods employed and outlined within Chapter 3.

Forty-four organisational strategy documents and seventeen interview transcripts were analysed. Details of each organisation is included within Appendix 1. In line with the research approach, each organisation and participant was assigned a unique identifier thereby maintaining a level of confidentiality. This step is key given the practitioner perspective and the need to secure personal reflections on the role of customers in local government service design and delivery. As set out in Chapter 3, a total of seventeen semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants from across the local government sector. The profile of interview participants is set in Appendix 2.

4.2 Findings from the Thematic Analysis

Initial codes were identified through a review of extant literature and through iterative analysis of organisational strategies and interview transcripts each code was grouped into a number of themes with each intended to provide a meaningful explanation of practitioner context and perspective.

4.2.1 Cultural Shift

Both within organisational strategies and participant interviews, cultural change appeared as a recurrent theme with a clear need to move from what was seen as a "traditional local government culture" to one which was "more modern and responsive" (organisation 13). This traditional culture was described as:

"One size fits all" (organisation 27)

"Not wanting to involve customers" (p3)

"[Participation being a] tick box exercise" (p 3, 6, 16 and 17)

Focus appeared very much to be centred around process and procedure with a requirement to move from service-orientated ways of working to approaches that were centred around customers. The current state was perceived to be somewhat adrift from the aspiration for local authorities with a sense that the step change required to move to the desired state as something involving the building and development of a new organisational culture (organisations 13, 38 and 42).

This perceived cultural and behavioural shift was viewed as a radical departure from the current state with the new culture described as being "customer-focused" (organisation 17, 18, 23, 24, 34 and 42), with employees valued and encouraged to embrace more participative approaches to service delivery with customers actively involved (organisations 20, 32). The culture was perceived to require increased focus on continuous improvement underpinned by greater emphasis on performance management principles and a can do attitudinal shift across the workforce (organisations 2, 3, 8, 13, 22, 25 and 32).

This change was consistently articulated as being transformative and therefore requiring a shift from the current state to one which encompassed new ways of working. The change was described as either being in train whereby the cultural shift was recognised and progress was being made or more of an aspiration which would require a significant level of time and effort to achieve the future desired state:

"[We're] designing services which are personalised to that particular individual based on what they can do, can't do, have and don't have" (p10).

"[It's not] a twelve month wonder, it's the next ten years of strategy. We need to understand the way in which the culture is going to shift to accommodate the new ways of working and understand the new relationship with the community" (p2).

"we are getting our programmes set in place to improve our people, our processes and within four or five years, we can make a huge difference" (p6).

A number of participants highlighted the need for staff to be engaged both in defining and delivering the shift to a new state. Participant 11 highlighted the value of having invested in what he saw to be a participative culture which, "involved your own staff and encouraged your own guys to contribute ideas and get feedback" on proposed changes to the organisation. Participant 14 suggested that, "if staff were listened to a little bit more than obviously the culture would start to shift slightly" thereby moving towards the future desired state.

4.2.2 Labels

There were a multitude of labels used to articulate roles at the intersect between agency and structure. Only two organisations sought to define the labels used to describe those people accessing and interacting with local government services. Within other strategy documents the terms were used interchangeably. Organisation 24 sought to define what the terms mean:

> *"Citizen" implies a resident of the city and someone exercising their statutory civil rights. "Client" refers to professional services and a person dependent on the protection of another. "Customer" can be defined as a person, company or other entity which obtains goods or services from another person, company or entity.*

Organisation 20 had a similar definition for the term customer:

> *In terms of this strategy the 'customer' is defined as 'all those who benefit from the services we provide, and therefore, everyone in the chain that supports the final delivery of front-line services, has customers.*

Within the other organisations, terms were used interchangeably with little consensus on what the terms meant and how these were to be applied.

Participants identified a plethora of labels used to describe the relationship between those individuals accessing or in receipt of local government services. In particular, the terms citizen, client, consumer, customer, neighbour, partner, resident, service user, tenant, visitor and tourist were referenced during the participant interviews. Each of these terms described the relationship in a slightly different way with citizen perceived to, "give you greater rights over the service delivered" (p2), the use of customer is seen as "a more empowering term" (p14), whereas service user was perceived to imply passivity, someone who is "using the council's services" (p17), who may be "in receipt of a long term package of care" (p11) and will typically "use whichever channel we set out for them" (p1).

Particularly within the strategy documents, there was a notable reference to "staff" with focus placed on the need to develop their skills to embrace new ways of working, ensuring that the needs of customers were put first. The references to

staff appeared to be approached from an internally focused perspective and whilst not explicitly stated widely within the strategy documents there was a clear indication of a gap between current provision and where local authorities needed to be in terms of thinking around customers and how the intersect between customers and local authorities needed to shift (see cultural and behavioural shift for further insight on this area).

There was no reference to the importance of labels within strategy documentation with differing perspectives on the importance of the label itself amongst interview participants. For some participants, there was a sense that the label didn't have significant relevance. "No, it's just a tag, which is probably a historical label" (p4). Whilst others shared this perspective they also introduced a sense that whilst the label wasn't perceived to be important, it did offer insight as to the lens through which local authorities saw their customers, "No, I don't think it is [important]. I think it's more to do with how we see the customer" (p3). This lens was seen to be particularly helpful in determining the role the customer played, the pathway or process followed and the service that they ultimately received. "Typically the label would lead you to different pathways, different processes or different services" (p13). Having different labels enabled a common and consistent level of understanding of different customer groups and enabled granular levels of analysis to be undertaken. "So when you start structuring any of this data and pulling out any sort of intelligence there are differences and those nuances become really relevant" (p10). These nuances were seen to be particularly critical when considering the process of segmentation whereby services are adapted to meet the specific needs of different customer groups. "What they are called doesn't matter, but the services they can get from us does, so the fact that we tailor our services to the different types of customer is important" (p16).

4.2.3 Customer Insight

Within organisational strategies and participant interviews repeated reference was made for the need to use customer insight to inform and shape local government service design and delivery. A consistent theme centred around customer insight providing a way through which practitioners could understand customer behaviour, their experiences, attitudes, needs and wants of the council. Organisation 41 saw customer insight as:

> *"Understanding the who, what, when, how and why, will enable services to become more efficient, effective and improve the customer experience"*

Customer insight was seen as a mechanism through which:

> *"We can develop a comprehensive picture of the people we serve and use that insight to develop the services that we provide" (p1)*

The information was seen to offer an outside-in view of customers accessing services and provided a way in which local authorities could get early sight of shifting needs and expectations, better understanding of customer segments and their specific support requirements.

> *"We did a piece of work on social isolation where we were trying to predict the areas where people may live and how we best respond to that" (p8).*

Securing this macro view of customer need, expectations and requirements was consistently viewed as primarily a desktop exercise:

"One of the challenges that we have is trying to find the right people to interact with" (p1)

"[we are] not being able to ring everyone up and ask their views" (p8).

The approach was perceived to be somewhat reductionist with micro level encounters aggregated up to provide a macro level view thereby losing the richness of lower level insight through such approaches and ways of working.

Participants described data as being a critical component through which meaningful insight could be captured, analysed and appropriate conclusions drawn. However, participants described data capture as being variable in terms of the approach, range of datasets accessible and general ability to tap in to insight as required. Data sources referenced included the organisation's customer relationship management solution, web-based analytics packages, social media and complaints data and whilst there wasn't a common set of data sources which each participant referenced what was consistent was a sense that approaches were:

"Patchy, it's very well designed in certain areas, but not as well designed in others" (p10)

"I think in this area we can always do more" (p15).

Whilst the value of customer insight was recognised and pockets of good practice were detailed particularly within the space of web analytics and associated insights on customer behaviour, the lived reality of participants was that organisation-wide, insight-based approaches remained aspirational in the main:

"Customer insight is one of those things that I am aware of but I haven't seen where it's positively impacted a project" (p7).

"I've tried to find out information about what customers think, want, etc, and in general there hasn't been the data or insight there that I would have wanted really" (p5).

4.2.4 Customer Engagement

In seeking to critically examine practitioner perspectives of customer role at the intersect between agency and structure, a consistent theme emerging from the organisational strategies and interviews related to customer engagement. Whereas insight was viewed to provide a macro-view of customer needs and expectations determined through data-driven approaches and techniques, engagement was perceived to be a more direct and active approach through which the micro-view of a customer's lived experience and what they valued could be elicited:

"We got customers involved because ultimately how do you know what the value is you're trying to get through the system if you don't actually talk to the end customers" (p13).

Participants identified a range of engagement approaches including both direct and indirect engagement methods:

"We'd often use observation, work study or call listening to get a less direct view of how successful the service is in delivering against the customer expectations" (p7).

"We engaged local community groups to have an interactive discussion about essential changes and what the impact would be for them" (p1).

> *"[customer experience forums provide] a number of useful recommendations and some excellent comments were received to support the development of the contact centre, local access facilities and self service facilities including the web" (organisation 41).*

These approaches were perceived to be particularly helpful when assessing potential outcomes from proposed service design or delivery changes

> *"When we do seek customer involvement, we are trying to establish if we were to do A, would that lead to B or would that as a point of view of you as a customer, lead to C?" (p10).*

A consistent theme to emerge related to how local authorities *engage the right people* in the process thereby having confidence that the engagement is representative of the broader customer base or specific customer segments impacted by how services are designed and delivered. Participants referred to issues of independence and relevance of individuals or groups providing the voice of the customer and the value therefore derived through effort invested in such approaches:

> *"Quite often they weren't independent people, there were people who had an interest in the organisation. They might be former members of staff, they might be family members of members of staff, so you're not able to get that independent, balanced view" (p1).*

> *"You'd get the same usual people to come forward so in my experience it was really hard to engage with customers" (p6).*

> *"We do really try and engage with different groups but the difficulty with that in my experience is it tends to the same people who appear in*

different guises so you might have a very vocal group of carers for example but then they will always seem to be the core group of 20 people who are on every group that pops up with interviewing and that type of thing. I'm a little bit sceptical, a little bit cynical, I suppose because you're not getting the true opinion of customers because it tends to be the same people all of the time" (p14).

Participants referenced the *driver for engagement* and in turn the *stage at which customers are engaged* in the process as being notable points of discussion. The rationale for engagement was perceived to be largely driven by organisational policy, decision-making, legislative or regulatory requirements:

"Where we do engage, it's generally where we've got some form of obligation to do some form of consultation" (p3).

"To be brutally honest, it can sometimes come across as a tick box exercise, you've done it and it's part of a process to get stuff through to cabinet and get a decision made by the members" (p6).

"There is also a political aspect to involving certain groups of users or certain groups of customers particularly if members are involved to show that we are close to our customers as an organisation. That doesn't mean to say that their involvement isn't important or valuable, it is just the political reality of these opportunities and the report that comes out of the other side that says we engaged these citizens in this work" (p13).

As referenced earlier, some participants identified the culture of the organisation as being a notable influence on perceptions and realities around customer engagement:

"I think the culture within the organisation does dictate the level to which customers are involved" (p1).

"If we go back a few years, the council was a very closed organisation, we didn't do a lot of consultation, it was just to tick a box, but over the last two years that's changed dramatically, we're actually more open about what we are doing and actually feedback about the consultation that took place. You said this, we did this, this is the impact it's had" (p16).

With reference to the point at which customers are engaged, participants rarely saw customers being involved during the pre-design stages of the process:

"I'm not sure I've ever really seen a true example of customers really driving design and delivery from day one" (p5).

However, in instances where this did occur, the value of the approach wasn't apparent:

"We have a citizen's panel that talks around things of concern and things that the council might do and might not do but that is not a decision-making body by any manner or means, it's more of an informative talking shop" (p4).

I think there is very little engagement with service users that shapes what we do" (p3).

Participants did reference a number of instances where customers were engaged during subsequent design phases with an emerging view that engagement was

typically at the point that the design had been created or when a decision had been made and it was being socialised as part of an implementation process:

> *"They're not so much involved in the upfront design of the service but those do provide extremely valuable feedback on early designs which have the opportunity to be updated and amended based on that feedback" (p1).*

> *"With the customers it's usually via proposals, so this is what we are proposing, so this is our plan, what's your feedback?" (p15).*

Participants indicated that whilst customers were engaged in the design stage, the extent to which this positively impacted subsequent designs was limited:

> *"The engagement piece was always about what do you think and how could we improve but we didn't really take it further in terms of anything more detailed from a collaboration point of view" (p13).*

> *"You engage them but even that level of engagement is coming to tell you what we are proposing to do and get your feedback but more often than not, it's what we are doing, we are not getting feedback, it's what we are doing. When we harmonised the waste collections, there was no way those contracts weren't going to get harmonised, but we still wrote to people to tell them and we invited people to write to us. It didn't matter what they were going to say, we weren't going to change it" (p3)*

The perception that engagement was more of a validation exercise whereby the expectation that customers would endorse or provide comment on the decision

rather than be an integral part of the design and decision-making process was consistent:

> *"It almost feels as though the decision has been made anyway and they want customers to say, well yes that's ok and there might be a few tweaks here and there. I'm not aware of anyone actually sitting down from scratch and saying this is a pot of money, this what we want to achieve, how do we do it?" (p15).*

This engagement and the role of customers in this process was primarily seen as passive rather than active with this perspective being derived through one of two emerging themes. The first theme as discussed above related to a sense that decisions had been made by the local authority and engagement was ultimately a form of one-way communication whereby customers were informed rather than engaged in a meaningful way. The second theme related to an absence of active engagement on the part of the customer during the design phase or prior to final design decisions being made:

> *"We've put things out to consultation, a good example is street lighting, we did a massive consultation on street lighting as all street lighting were being turned off in the county. Prior to the street lights being turned off, we didn't get much of a response at all but as soon as the event happened and they were switched off, that's when the feedback and engagement really began and long after the consultation had closed. So I think, customers in my opinion, I think are only really willing to engage if it's directly affecting them" (p11).*

> *"So if you're asking why are people more likely to engage with the council in terms of wanting to design and wanting to have a word to say, it would be when something new is being introduced or when*

something is being taken out. So it tends to be more of a once you start unbalancing the system, there is a reaction from the community" (p10).

This does raise an interesting tension as organisations are perceived to engage under a number of specific scenarios including the testing of near final designs, validation of decisions or an invitation to feedback on decisions, which may or may not be visible to the customer, that have been made and a perception that customers only engage when there is an 'unbalancing of the system' or a change being made which directly impacts them.

In addition to the perceived challenges associated with customer engagement, the current financial pressures facing local authorities were seen as a significant barrier both in terms of engaging customers and managing the resultant expectation once customers had offered their views and perspectives on both the design and delivery of local government services. From one perspective, when local authorities are facing such significant cuts, the process of engagement itself was perceived to be one of those capabilities or functions that had to be reduced or removed:

"We run resident engagement lists and satisfaction surveys, that sort of thing. The problem is they are also the first thing to go when the budget gets cut" (p10).

"It's very difficult to engage the customer when you're having to make such stinging cuts. CEOs and directors that really care about their customers are being forced to do things that they really wouldn't want to do because they've got to cut in to muscle and bone." (p5).

The tension between a desire to engage whilst ensuring that the organisation operated within an increasingly cash constrained environment was a consistent

theme. One local authority was actively seeking to engage customers to help make sense of this particular challenge:

> *"We are opening our arms up to people, please come forward, please tell us about things that are working well, please tell us what we didn't do that well. At the same time, recognising thousands of pounds are being reduced off the council budget so it's about squaring that circle and what we can do with the money we've got" (p2).*

4.2.5 Experiential Knowledge and Insight

Experiential knowledge and insight was less prevalent in strategies and whilst implied, there were few specific references to this. Organisation 18 set out their view on the value of experiential knowledge and insight:

> *"It is also true that services should also be better for employees. Front line public sector staff – not just those in front line offices but those answering calls in contact centres and developing services for the web should have a strong culture of service. These employees have a significant contribution to make regarding the design and delivery of front line services. It is therefore crucial to use this knowledge and expertise whenever services require re-designing"*

It was however a strong theme within the participant interviews with experiential knowledge and insight perceived to be of significant value when considering service design and delivery. Whilst there was an overarching desire to involve customers in the design process, there was no evidence of them being involved from the outset of the process:

"I'm not aware of anyone actually sitting down from scratch and saying this is a pot of money, this is what we want to achieve, how do we do it?" (p14).

"I'm not sure I've ever really seen a true example of customers really driving design and delivery from day one" (p5)

Participants did however introduce the concept of *service experts* which was a term used to describe practitioners within the council who had developed expertise through formal training, practice and experiential learning. This expertise was described as covering the process required to deliver the service but also the deep knowledge and insight required to help a customer fulfil their need (P1, 8, 12 and 14). Service experts and the heuristic knowledge and insight they had was used to support design activities which were seen as being undertaken from an inside-out perspective whereby practitioners within the local authority leveraged knowledge of the situation, context and their practical experience of designing and delivering services to inform development of an initial design or proposal which could be subsequently tested with customers:

"A big part of the agenda was to drive efficiencies, as well as improve service. Often the design would be done around how do we make this process more streamlined to make it more efficient from a cost perspective and off the back of that the by-product is that the service would be improved" (p3).

"With the customers it's usually via proposals, so this is what we are proposing, so this is our plan, what's your feedback?" (p15).

This approach resulted in customers being seen as "passive" participants with knowledge of staff being seen as a preferred way through which services could be designed and developed.

Service experts were also used to test emerging design and improvement opportunities due to the practitioner knowledge and insight that they have but also because those individuals would have the role of customer of the council by virtue of them living within the geographic area covered by the local authority:

> *"We had lots of staff who are residents so we'd use the staff in the call centre and wherever, it wasn't always in customer services but people across the organisation and use resource we already had to test things" (p17).*

> *"We've actually tested amongst ourselves which is very different to testing it with a community group, or a service user, or a service user's carer, etc, so there isn't as extensive engagement as there probably should be" (p10).*

4.2.6 Drivers for customer participation

Organisational strategies referenced a need for customer participation but they were less explicit in the rationale for adopting such approaches with customer experience, cost and decision-making seen as influencing factors. Participant interviews revealed a much richer set of insights with a number of drivers for customer participation within their respective organisations including customer experience, customer choice, empowerment, cost, decision-making and reputation.

Customer experience was a common theme across the sample with emphasis placed on participative approaches representing a fundamental shift in thinking with focus placed on designing from the outside-in:

> *"The benefit comes from focusing on the customer rather than your own internal views of how the world should work" (p12).*

Participant 11 echoed this perspective and talked about benefits to both the customer and the business of undertaking participative approaches to service design and delivery:

> *"From the customer's perspective, it's an improved customer journey and user-friendliness. Very often we'll design something that we think is user friendly because we're in the business and we are used to the lingo but you launch it to customers and it can cause confusion or be unclear. I suppose from our perspective, it can reduce unneeded contact if we make the service more streamlined and user-friendly."*

Focusing on the customer's experience was seen to drive improved customer satisfaction and in turn reduce the number of complaints fielded by the organisation:

> *"We had loads of complaints so we looked at the process, identified the main issue which was waiting time and worked with customers to improve the process. It's made a huge difference." (p15).*

The concept of choice was apparent within organisational strategies and participant discussions. There was a clear recognition that within the context of local government, customers did not have a choice of providers through which services could be accessed, however, there were differing perspectives as to the value of participation against this backdrop:

"Local authorities don't need to compete for business, so it's not as high a priority as it would be for other organisations" (p3).

"It's not like they have a choice. You live where you live and access the services you can and get what you're given" (p8).

However, Participant 1, argued that the absence of choice meant that participative approaches were of greater significance:

"For local authorities, it is to me more important because they don't have options to take their business elsewhere."

Whilst participants described constraints around the choice of providers, organisational strategies were silent on this point and focused on the need to provide choice on how services are accessed and how customers can interact with the council. Of the strategies reviewed 61% referenced choice of access channel with none referencing the absence of choice around service provider.

There was repeated reference to empowerment as a driver for customer participation and a perception that involving customers in the design and delivery of services could drive greater levels of customer self-sufficiency.

"If you're working collaboratively with the customer then the chances are you can help that customer be more self-sufficient" (p4).

For Participant 10, as the organisation's values were built around helping people to help themselves, customer participation provided a meaningful platform through which these values could be operationalised both in how services are designed and delivered. This ethos of helping customers to help themselves was underpinned by

a drive to empower those accessing council services but was also influenced by the need to reduce costs within the organisation.

Cost was seen to be particularly important to all participants interviewed with many perceiving this to be the primary driver for embracing participative approaches:

> *"Money. Ultimately that's what it is. There are a lot of other benefits as well but the big one is driving down cost" (p9)*

> *"As an organisation, we've got in the same way as other local authorities and have huge savings to achieve. The difference with our organisation is that we aren't just slashing and burning, we are looking at what the needs of our customers and residents are, particularly businesses, and we're shaping our services to meet their needs." (p16)*

The reference to business provides a useful insight regarding the shifting nature of local government funding with practitioners recognising that increasingly their organisations will be funded by business rates.

Whilst finances were viewed as a significant influence, they were perceived by some participants as a barrier to participative working both in terms of motivation and outcome:

> *"I also think that people don't find the financial side of things most exciting, if anything they find it most frightening. Actually, the place where you will get people's creativity and their sense of purpose and their drive for or ambition to do something better is around the value of something to a customer" (p2).*

"If you look at the commercials, we've got to make collecting the bins or fixing the street lights financially viable so involving customers too much won't be helpful because it becomes non-viable or non-cost effective." (p3)

"It's very difficult to engage the customer when you're having to make such stinging cuts." (p5)

As referenced earlier, customer participation was seen as an enabler for swifter decision-making processes particularly where cabinet was involved:

"The biggest benefit from my perspective in my roles was being able to get decisions made a lot quicker. Without that engagement at the beginning of the process it literally would hold things up and I've been in circumstances, situations, where you've got to cabinet with your papers, you've presented them and the question has been asked, has such and such been consulted and the answer comes back, no, right, well, we're not making a decision at all."

"If the majority of customers are going to be happy with the proposed solution, you are more likely to get buy in from members" (p15)

Participants suggested that reputation was a key driver for participation:

"If you take money aside, ultimately it boils down to reputation. If we make it easy and simple for customers to interact with us, if they feel involved, if they feel the service is getting tailored to them as individuals, overall the perception of the council will be improved therefore our reputation will be improved" (p9).

"For me it's firstly reputational. It makes us more in tune with what the tax payers want and means they're more likely to interact with the authority and engage with the things that we need them to." (p12)

4.2.7 Role in design

When exploring the role that customers played in service design activities, there was an emerging sense of passivity, whereby local authorities were perceived to take the lead in matters relating to design:

"I think we kind of design the services unilaterally and then gather feedback later once they've been launched and then make tweaks as appropriate based on feedback" (p11).

When considering normative regulation, this sense of passivity was seen as an accepted approach or practice. Influence in terms of defining new ways of working sat with the local authorities as employed agents possessed the authority to determine new ways of working or new service designs. Customer's evaluating actions and rights were called upon but primarily as and when determined by human agency residing within the local authority. There was a view that customers and communities would, however, participate when the change was perceived to have a notable impact on them personally:

"My sense is that there are isolated pockets of good practice but generally communities are quite passive. It only becomes really active when there's a specific issue, if you try to do fracking in their community, or there is a mast going up near a school, something that triggers a reaction, you get more activity" (p15).

Whilst customers could shift from a perceived state of passivity to a more active role, the capacity and capability for normative regulation determining practice and

ultimately the role that customers could play within this context was perceived by practitioners to lie with the local authority. Customer action was viewed as not directly influencing outcome or impact of current services or new service designs.

A number of participants referenced a move towards more collaborative approaches to service design:

> *"As we become more and more digitised, we become more and more collaborative by the very nature of our interactions on social media with the public. We are moving towards that and there is some evidence, particularly around foster care where you've got social interaction between established foster carers and potential foster carers. We are actually getting feedback from the established foster carers about what needs to change to get more foster carers in the business" (p16).*

> *"I haven't seen a lot of evidence of councils that say OK, I'm getting you in at ground level before we've done anything. It's more we want to make this more collaborative, we can do using different technology. It's a little bit, build this and they will come." (p5)*

However, a number of participants argued that even where an intention to collaborate existed, the approach adopted didn't pay enough attention to the differing customer groups and how they might want to collaborate:

> *"There's very little option around how you can get involved and I think those options are often one size fits all. I don't think we do enough around understanding who is going to want to have an opinion on this and how we best engage with them to make it as simple as possible to do that with a minimum amount of time." (p3)*

"My council is doing an online survey to receive feedback about proposed changes to service provision. I managed to find the survey via the website of a local newspaper but my neighbours weren't even aware that the council is proposing the change." (p1)

Whilst some intent was perceived to exist, the real world constraints apparent both in terms of human and agency and structure were seen to limit the scope and scale of this intent and therefore the resultant role that customers play within the intersect between customers as human agents, local authorities and the rules and resources governing interactions.

4.2.8 Role in service delivery

When considering the role of customers in local government service delivery, there was a sense amongst practitioners of a connection between service complexity and the level of participation:

"It's very dependent on the service that they're accessing. If it's an occasional, transactional service that they're accessing so a highways fault report, I think it's quite low level. They'll make the initial contact with the council and it's in our hands to do something with it and we'll update them on the progress of it but it's quite low level. I think a lot of our services are fairly low level but then you look at school admissions or adults social care which by their very nature, you're going to have quite a high level of participation" (p11).

There was a perception that as budgets reduced, councils were seeking to minimise the level of customer participation in service delivery through simplification, standardisation and digitisation of services:

"There has been quite an increase in the number of services where they've enabled lower levels of participation and that's been enabled digitally as well" (p5).

This can however create tension around levels of expectation:

"As budgets dwindle, there's a massive push to put as many transactional services on line as is humanly possible. We've got a digital board which is looking to plug any existing gaps we might have. As those gaps are plugged, we are expecting customers to self-serve more so we are expecting more of them and in turn they're expecting a little bit more of us as well" (p11).

This move to a "break-fix" model for transactional services minimised the role of customers thereby placing greater emphasis on the role of the council in delivery of a resolution to the customer's problem (p7).

Where services would historically require a higher level of participation on both the part of the customer and the local authority, there was a sense amongst practitioners of a move to reduce the council's role within this relationship where it was safe and practicable to do so:

"We build everything around helping people to help themselves. That's around giving people the right to self-help, giving people the right information so they can go and make arrangements for themselves, from the transactional side all the way to empowering communities and giving them the tools to be able to meet need within their community without statutory interventions" (p10).

> *"Customers are getting increased input with some councils going to a model where the customer controls their own care budget." (p5)*

There was a perceived shift in the degree of power as the complexity of service increased. Where services were transactional in nature, the local authority was viewed by practitioners as retaining clear responsibility of allocative resources and how these were deployed as a result of a customer interaction. However, as service complexity increased, practitioners provided a sense that local authorities were increasingly seeking to allocate and authorise resources to the customer for them to use to address their specific need. Where local authorities were perceived to exercise "power-over" customers and the resultant allocative resources during transactional encounters, the shift apparent where services were more complex was perceived to involve the customer gaining "power-from-within" (Laverack, 2016, p. 11).

A number of participants talked about a shift in role with customers increasingly becoming "partners" within the context of service delivery (p12). This shift involved customers and communities delivering services on behalf of or in place of the council:

> *"It costs the council a lot of money to grit the road and put salt out but we can't do all the priority routes that we used to so we are engaging with the public to say actually if you can engage with us, you can grit the roads in this way and you can help your neighbours out and bringing that culture of collective social responsibility for some aspects of service delivery" (p12).*

Participants 4 and 16 talked about community halls and luncheon capabilities being handed over to community groups with the council providing funding to

enable the transition and ongoing delivery of services previously provided by the local authority. An increasing trend around libraries was discussed with:

> *"communities stepping in and becoming involved in the delivery of the service which has meant that libraries could continue to function where potentially otherwise there wouldn't have been funding for them to function" (p10).*

> *"We're only planning on having four key libraries, the other seventeen will be run by volunteers" (p17).*

4.2.9 Technology as an enabler

Technology was identified as a key theme by practitioners. Embracing digital technologies to simplify, standardise and automate ways of working was seen as a primary application particularly in relation to transactional capabilities:

> *"Technology is used to try and provide structure to things, where possible, so they can be done by non-experts which can be done cheaper or quicker or can be automated" (p1).*

Innovations discussed by Participant 10 included the development of timeshare applications whereby people could share their time and expertise with other people who needed help within the locality which was seen to move their approach on from helping customers to help themselves to a model whereby the council enabled customers to help each other.

Whilst there was reference to local authorities using progressive capabilities such as artificial intelligence (AI) to support service delivery (p5), there was an overarching sense that technology capabilities were not where they needed to be,

"Obviously, technology is key to driving customer participation. I personally think we are massively behind the curve with our technology and are complacent." (p9)

"Well-intentioned but rarely well utilised" (p1)

"[we're] 10 years behind the curve" (p2)

"At the moment there is no customer relationship management (CRM) system" (p17).

There was however a sense that this was an area that local authorities are making strides forward in:

"I think this is one area where local authorities are getting a lot better, it's mixed, some are better than others, but I think they've made huge strides in making websites more accessible, improving user experience, making them more transactional" (p5).

"What I'm hoping I suppose is they can leapfrog some of the development by actually looking at technology in a lot more, becoming more digitally native I suppose." (p2)

4.3 Summary

Themes identified through thematic analysis are summarised in table 4 with an articulation of their alignment to the overarching research objectives provided.

Theme	Findings from Thematic Analysis	Alignment to Research Objectives
Cultural Shift	Cultural change appeared as a recurrent theme with focus on shifting from traditional, bureaucratic cultures to one which was more modern and responsive	Culture change was seen as a key enabler in moving to more participative approaches to service design and delivery. Practitioner's perceived this to be a significant undertaking which was more constraining than enabling at present.
Labels	There are a plethora of labels used to describe the relationship between those individuals accessing or in receipt of local government services. There were differing perceptions of the value of each label, no common definition for each term and apparent interchangeability in practitioner discourse.	Perspectives on the concept of "customer" varied across organisational strategies and practitioner discourse. Differing perspectives exist with scope to move to a common taxonomy for differing individuals and groups.
Customer Insight	The need for macro level customer insight to inform and shape service design and delivery with focus on customer	Customer insight was perceived to be an enabling capability to inform the design and delivery of services. This was perceived

	behaviour, customer experience, attitudes, needs and wants.	to be a macro level undertaking which negated the need for direct intervention of customers in design and delivery processes.
Customer Engagement	The practitioner requirement for a micro-level view of customer's experiences, what they value and their expectations including drivers for engagement and the point at which customers should be directly engaged.	Customer engagement provided a direct micro level mechanism through which customers participated in design and delivery activities. Practitioners articulated a sense of passivity on the part of customers with roles primarily determined by the local authority.
Experiential Knowledge and Insight	This theme relates to the concept of service experts or practitioners who have developed service expertise through formal training, practice and experiential learning. Experiential knowledge and insight relates to inside-out design approaches where practitioners determine through their lived experiences how services should be designed and delivered.	Practitioners perceived experiential knowledge as a capability which minimised the need for customer participation in service design activities. It was perceived as enabling and constraining – enabling design without customer involvement but in turn constraining the participative role of customers.
Drivers for customer participation	This theme relates to potential outcomes practitioner's identified as being achievable	Practitioners identified a number of drivers for change which provided a sense of the

	through participative approaches including better customer experience, choice, empowerment, cost reduction, improved decision-making and reputation.	potential positive impact that customer participation could have. Whilst drivers for change were apparent, evidence of outcomes achieved was limited.
Actor role in service design	This theme provides insight as to practitioner perceptions of actors and the role they play in designing services. A sense of passivity is examined and the shift to more collaborative approaches enabled through digital technologies.	In examining the role of customers in service design, a perception of passivity was apparent unless the issue in question was perceived to have a significant impact on customers or their communities.
Actor role in service delivery	Actor role in service delivery provides insight on practitioner perspectives on service complexity and in turn the level of participation. Cost as a driving influence for reduced actor participation is examined with enabling technologies supporting these efforts.	A correlation between service complexity and level of participation was apparent when considering customer role in service delivery. As service complexity increased, customers were expected to participate to a greater level. In parallel, the role of practitioners was perceived to reduce. The need to reduce cost was seen as a primary driver for such approaches.
Technology as an enabler	This theme relates to the growing prevalence of digital technologies and how these	Technology emerged as a key enabler for more participative approaches to service design

	enable more participative approaches to service design and delivery. The organisational maturity in embracing key technologies is examined.	and delivery, however, this was also perceived as a significant constraint as many practitioners felt that their respective organisations were not capitalising on the opportunities afforded through technology enablement.

Table 4: Themes and descriptive labels defined through thematic analysis

There was a strong correlation between insights captured through thematic analysis of organisational strategy documents and semi-structured interviews with practitioners from across the local government sector. Practitioner responses were richer in relation to the breadth and depth of insight providing a clear view around organisational intent to involve customers in the design and delivery of services but a less positive perception regarding the extent to which this was operationalised within the live environment. Whilst organisational strategy documents provided a forward look on how roles at the intersect between customer and the structures within which they operate were intended to evolve and develop, insight from practitioners during semi-structured interviews revealed a less clear picture with organisational intent not feeding through to current praxis. Where extant literature articulated a shift from traditional bureaucratic approaches to customer participation and engagement to something more agile involving human agents drawing on their own reflexivity to act in any given way, practitioners described a multi-faceted picture consisting of pockets of good practice within a wider environment of more traditional approaches to service design and delivery. Customers exercising power both in terms of normative regulation and the authorisation / allocation of resources was very much perceived

to be determined by the human agency within the local authority. Customers could act otherwise but ultimately local authorities retained "power-over" customers both in the design and delivery of services. Where power was perceived to be shared, the underlying premise was perceived to be one of cost reduction.

Findings captured through thematic analysis provide rich insight on practitioner perspectives of the concept of customer, the roles that customers play, perceived impact on service delivery and those factors seen to enable or constrain participative approaches. Figure 4 provides an emerging framework which builds upon the coding structure included within Appendix 6 (p. 180) together with the themes as set out above. The model below details those inputs perceived to enable participative approaches together with practitioner perceptions of impact:

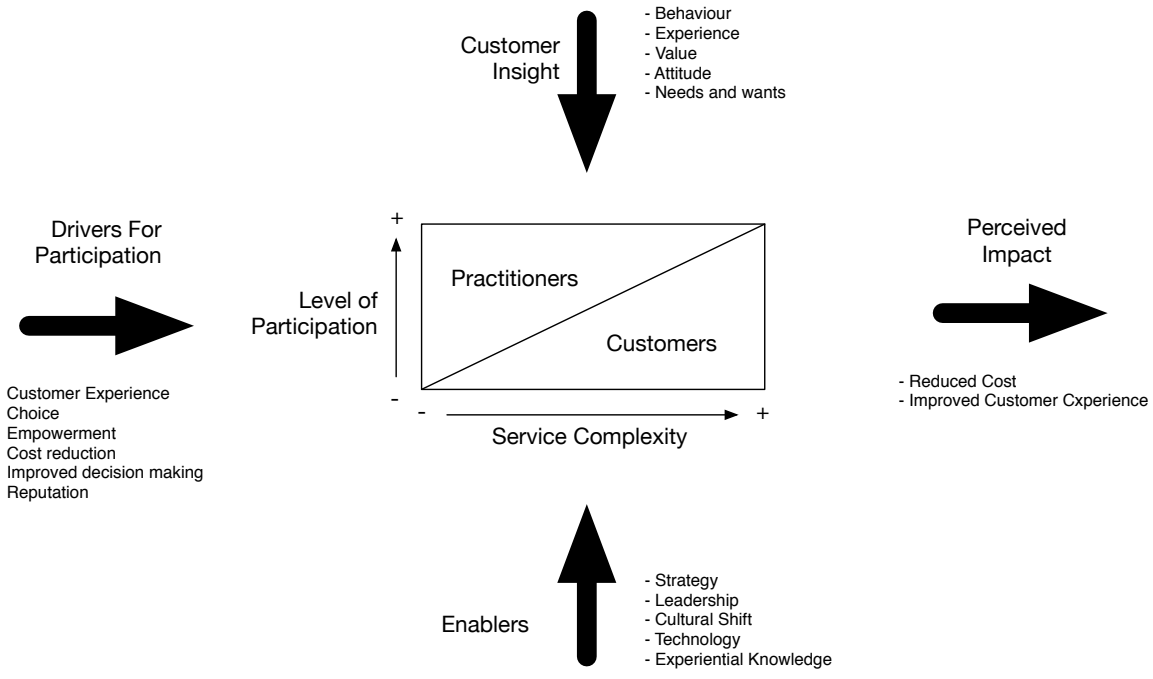

Figure 4: Emerging framework setting out inputs and impact of participative approaches to service design and delivery

The coding structure developed through thematic analysis provided the main features of the model including drivers for participation, the perceived value of customer insight, the need for key enabling capabilities, the impact of service complexity on level of participation and practitioner perceptions of impact that participative approaches have on the design and delivery of contact centre services.

In developing the model, root and child codes defined through thematic analysis were considered as a set of structural properties, rules and resources which in turn were examined in relation to their relationship, influence and impact (Porpora, 1989). The coding structure provided the structural properties shaping the inputs to this social system and the "limits" or constraints governing the role of customers in the design and delivery of contact centre services (Giddens, 1984, p. 177). Within the context of this model a series of inputs, processes and outcomes were captured, organised and presented in line with these broad groupings and consideration given to their relationship with one another. Structural properties representing inputs include drivers for participation with customer insight and enablers representing those inputs perceived to constrain the role of customers within this social construct. In addition, a further constraint was identified relating to the process of customer participation with service complexity perceived to constrain the role of customers within the design and delivery of contact centre services. As impact of customers is a key objective within this research, the coding structure provided insight on the perceived outcomes of customer participation with cost and experience seen as those most prevalent within the research, however, realisation of these benefits and the co-creation of value inherent them was perceived rather than actual based on the lived experience of practitioners.

The sample size and point in time nature of the thematic analysis spanning organisational documentation and semi-structured interviews does provide meaningful insight but may be seen as limited both in term of reach and the absence of longitudinal insight. In conclusion, the research findings suggest an organisational intent to adapt and develop the role of customers within the intersect between agency and structure, however, the extent to which this has been achieved to date or will be achieved is somewhat questionable given differing practitioner perspectives on the value of adopting such approaches and the need to rapidly drive cost out of their respective organisations.

5 Analysis of Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the results set out within the preceding sections and seeks to discuss the theoretical and practical implications of the research findings against the overarching objectives of this programme of study. This chapter consists of five sections. Within the first section, emerging findings are introduced and critically discussed, the second section examines the concept of "customer" within a local government context with practitioner perspectives compared with extant literature. Focus is then placed on the practitioner perspectives of the role that customers play in service design and delivery with an evaluation of organisational and practitioner perceptions. The perceived impact of customer participation on service delivery is discussed within the third section with further exploration of key insights against existing bodies of literature. Finally, the factors enabling and / or constraining the role of customers in service design and delivery are examined.

5.2 Emerging research findings

Analysis of extant literature revealed a number of terms used to describe those individuals accessing services from organisations. Thematic analysis of organisational strategy documentation and interview transcripts demonstrates a consistent picture with eleven different labels identified to describe "customers", no common definition and terms used interchangeably. Where theorists perceived terms such as citizen to be disempowering (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Corbett, 2014; Osborne et al, 2016; Lawler, 2016), in contrast, practitioners viewed this as an empowering descriptor giving the individual "rights" over services provided (p2).

A common theme emerging through the analysis was a sense of passivity with customers and communities only engaging in the design of services when there was a significant issue impacting them or their community. Where NPM was anticipated to drive a shift to increased customer reflexivity, empowerment and active co-creation of services (Giddens & Pierson, 1998; Lengnick-Hall et al, 2000; Yi et al, 2011; Mukhtar et al, 2012; Donetto, 2014), the research identified a somewhat different perspective with practitioners arguing that customers operated within the constraints as set out by human agents within the respective organisation. This counters Giddens (Bryant and Jary, 2011) assertion that actors can act otherwise in any given situation and in turn draws in to question the applicability of structuration theory to customers within the context of participation.

Through practitioner discourse, service complexity and the correlation to customer participation was examined. Consistent with Bitner et al's (1997) participative framework, transactional services were perceived to require lower levels of participation. However, as service complexity increased and theorists articulate a shift to more collaborative forms of participation (Arnstein, 1969; Bitner et al, 1997; Timney, 2015), practitioners posited a view that the role of customers, particularly in relation to service delivery, was anticipated to increase with local authorities increasingly employing strategies of retrenchment whereby their role would in turn decrease (Hastings et al, 2015).

Practitioners introduced a number of drivers for customer participation citing customer experience, choice, empowerment, cost, decision-making and reputation. However, analysis of strategy documentation and interview transcripts demonstrates limited correlation between the driver or rationale for participation and the resultant impact achieved through participative approaches to service design and delivery. Practitioners also articulated a perception that benefits associated with a shift to more participative approaches remained aspirational as

customer participation was yet to be embedded in a meaningful way across the sector and practitioner efforts have been focused on cost reduction strategies thereby limiting scope to drive the participative agenda forward.

Analysis of research findings identified a number of enabling capabilities perceived to drive a shift to more participative approaches to service design and delivery. Culture was perceived to be both an enabling and constraining factor with perceptions of a "traditional" and "one size fits all" approach constraining a shift to something centred around the needs of customers (organisations 13, 17, 18, 20, 23, 24, 27, 32, 34, 42, P7). Where Giddens (1984) perceived this shift to be an "evolutionary transformation", practitioners articulated a significant step change from where each organisation was to where it needed to be.

These emerging findings are explored in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

5.3 Practitioner perspectives on the concept of "customer"

A review of extant literature identified a number of differing terms used within the context of "customer" with such terms often used interchangeably with no common definition identified (McLaughlin, 2009; Clayton, 2013; Bodolica et al, 2015). A consistent picture was observed through thematic analysis of strategy documentation and participant interview transcripts. Practitioners set out a number of labels used to describe the role and relationship of individuals accessing or in receipt of local government services. Whilst a level of consistency existed in terms of the labels used, discussion with practitioners identified a level of interchangeability between the differing labels and the perspectives on these, an insight which chimes with Clarke and Newman's (2009) research on consumerist discourse. Eleven different labels were used to describe "customers" with each term articulating the relationship between the social actor and the local authority in slightly different ways. Where citizens were viewed as isolated, unaware and

passive within extant literature (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Corbett, 2014; Osborne et al, 2016; Lawler, 2016), practitioners saw citizen as having a greater level of power giving the customer "greater rights over the service delivered" (p2). The term service user was widely used by practitioners with this label used to describe a level of "passivity" whereby social actors "used" council services in any way set out by the organisation with practitioner perspectives of this term echoing that of theorists' perception of citizen. Consistent with academic thought (Lengnick-Hall et al, 2000; Mukhtar et al, 2012), customer was perceived to be an empowering descriptor with those individuals playing an integral role either directly or indirectly in service design and delivery processes.

In practitioner discourse around the differing terms for customer and their underlying meaning, the principle of choice was explored. Where Giddens (1989) saw actors as highly autonomous with a capability of "doing otherwise" in any given socially constructed reality, practitioners posited a very different view. Where customers and consumers were perceived to have a choice about which service and which organisation they engaged in the private sector, these options were perceived to be not available within the local government context thereby constraining the actions or options available to customers. These constraints align with Bryant and Jary's (2011, p. 17-18) view of "conditions of action" which shape and constrain human agency and align with Archer's (2010) criticism of Giddens' artificial inflation of an "actor's freedom for action".

The principles of power and the degree of power that social actors have in their interactions represents a consistent theme throughout the literature. Clarke et al (2007) and Malpass et al (2007) posited views around the positive impact of consumerist discourse on long held "paternalistic powers" of professionals. In their reflections around descriptive labels, practitioners introduced the concept of professional power both in terms of "power-over" and "power-with" (Laverack, 2016, p. 11). Regardless of the emphasis placed on differing descriptive labels,

practitioners talked about a need to "think about customers" in the context of service delivery which aligns to a collaborative approach to customer participation ("power-with"), however, a number of practitioners referenced the fact that customers "are the last people we think about" and "[customer participation] was secondary to our overriding agenda around what we are trying to achieve", in turn aligning to a implied "power-over" dynamic. This perspective aligns with the principle of domination within Giddens' structuration theory whereby actors have "command over objects, goods or material phenomena" (Giddens (1984, p. 33). Where a number of theorists have argued that customers have increasing levels of power (Clarke et al, 2007; Gabriel and Lang, 2015), insight from practitioners suggests that the "transformative capacity" of social actors apparent within structuration firmly rests with professionals and not customers.

Practitioners varied in their views of the importance of descriptive labels with some suggesting that it represented little more than a historic tag with others arguing that the label offered particular insight around practitioner perspectives of their relationship with customers, the impact it had on the customer's journey and the service that they ultimately received. A number of practitioners did highlight a benefit associated with the use of consistent descriptive labels particularly in relation to commonality of understanding and how this enabled a segmented approach to service design and delivery with the council's offer tailored to particular customer needs. There was no notable level of importance placed on labels within reviewed literature beyond academic perspectives on the positive and negative connotations associated with the different terms.

5.4 Practitioner perspectives of customer role in service design and delivery

A common issue apparent when considering practitioner perspectives of the role of customers in service design was a sense of "passivity" with customers or

communities only becoming "really active when there's a specific issue" anticipated to affect them personally (p15). A number of practitioners perceived this "passivity" to be somewhat negative and was reinforced in their perspectives on when and how customers should be engaged in the design of services. Considering passivity within the context of structuration theory, one could argue that practitioners are exercising normative regulation through which they apply judgement as to how and when they act (Bryant and Jary, 2011). This action in turn involves the practitioner's authorisation and allocation of resources which can be argued to constrain a customer's ability to act otherwise within these given set of circumstances. With practitioners perceived to take the lead in design activities, they are in a sense determining the extent to which customers are involved in this process but if one applies Giddens' duality of structure, customers can, should they choose, actively monitor the actions of the council and through a process of rationalisation, determine whether sufficient motivation exists to get involved in this design process. Their passivity in this scenario is therefore positive with their actions a result of active interpretation of relevant information, full cognisence of the normative regulation that exists and a determination on their part as to when to act drawing on allocative resources as they see fit. Naturally, this may be what O'Brien et al (1999) describes as a "sunny sense" view of actor reflexivity with passivity argued to be both positive or negative depending on whether one considers this from the lens of the customer or practitioner.

A number of participants referenced a move towards more collaborative approaches to service design enabled through digital technologies. Collaboration represents the mid-tier of Timney's (2015) graduated scorecard which she suggests involves a rebalancing of decision-making power between customer and government. However, in describing collaboration, terms such as "feedback", "survey" and "build this and they [the customer as collaborator] will come", do not suggest collaboration in the sense that Timney intended. Aligning practitioner insights to Timney's (2015) framework, the language used suggests a closer match

to the "passive" stage of collaboration whereby customers are asked for information with limited opportunity for two-way dialogue (Fairclough, 2010). "Control over public discourse" remains with the provider and ultimately they maintain a symbolic level of power (Dijk, 1998). Where Laverack (2016, p. 11) articulated collaborative forms of power sharing to involve "power-with" actors within a given context, practitioner views appear to reflect a continued sense of "power-over" with allocation and authorisation of resources lying with human agency within the local authority rather than the customer.

Practitioners talked about a "one size fits all" approach to collaboration with a failure to acknowledge the differing customer groups and how they, the customer, may want to collaborate. This macro level stance can be seen to align with what Stones (2005) refers to as "ontology-in-general" whereby the value to be derived through micro level engagement involving substantive interactions is missed (Bryant and Jary, 2011). Giddens and Sutton (2013) argue that one should consider both macro and micro perspectives with Collins (1981) suggesting that the multiple "aggregations and repetitions of micro-events" in turn make up a macro level perspective. Practitioners perceived the macro / micro levels as being addressed through two mechanisms, the macro through customer insight and the micro through direct or indirect customer engagement. Neither approach was viewed as being at a point of maturity with pockets of good practice articulated but no holistic strategy or framework apparent within any of the local authorities engaged. With theorists suggesting tht customer insight was a feature of customer-centred operations during the late 1990s / early 2000s, this does suggest that local authorities are significantly behind where they could or should be in relation to these capabilities (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2000; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Graf, 2007; Nambisan, 2008; Elg et al, 2012; Mukhtar et al, 2012; Corbett, 2014; McShane & Sabadoz, 2015; Omar et al, 2016). With practitioners suggesting a limited level of value being derived from macro level approaches and the absence of accepted frameworks for micro-level interactions, adoption of a clear customer

insight and engagement strategy whereby conversational encounters are captured around topics of interest and this insight blended with macro level customer data may represent a more appropriate approach for local authorities taking early steps in to a more collaborative approach to service design.

Practitioners talked of service complexity and level of participation particularly in relation to service delivery. For transactional services, customers were perceived to have a low level of participation with their role involving an initial contact with human agency within the local authority responsible for determining normative regulation, rules and allocation or authorisation of resources. This perspective aligns to Bitner et al's (1997) participative framework with low levels of participation requiring the social actor to be present to invoke service delivery but their involvement beyond this is limited or not required. Conversely, practitioners suggested that as financial constraints took hold, services which would traditionally involve a a high level of participation on both the part of the customer and council, were shifting to place greater focus and emphasis on "helping people to help themselves". Hastings et al (2015) describe this strategy as one of retrenchment whereby the council seeks to transition responsibility for services to the citizen, communities or third parties. This shift, which involves customers taking responsibility for the allocation of resources to meet their complex needs, does provide a somewhat confusing picture as services which inherently require high participation from both parties are moving to a state whereby customers take a much greater participative role with human agency from the local authority conversely retaining responsibility for the authorisation of resources but beyond this, their role and their interactions are perceived to reduce significantly. Practitioners described a correlation between service complexity and customer role with increased service complexity resulting in a higher level of participation on the part of the customer and lower level of involvement for human agency within the local authority.

5.5 Perspectives of the impact participation has on service delivery

Improved customer experience represented a consistent theme apparent within practitioner discourse with benefits anticipated around improved customer journeys, increased customer satisfaction and efficiency gains within the local authority. Whilst a number of practitioners highlighted practical examples of where these benefits had been delivered through participative approaches to service design and delivery, there was an underlying sense that many of the benefits remained aspirational as the shift required to enable their realisation was yet to be achieved. Whilst practitioners perceived levels of participation to be inherently low and passive in their nature and approach (Bitner et al, 1999; Timney, 2015), there was a recognition that the responsibility for enabling these benefits lied with the respective local authority and whilst they had an intention to move to more collaborative ways of working, few had put this intent in to action in clear and meaningful ways. Whilst practitioners retain high levels of transformative capacity (Giddens, 1984), they are constraining customers' ability, in their role as social actors, to "intervene" in design and delivery processes, resulting in missed opportunities to co-create value for customers and services providers alike whilst simultaneously dispelling views of bureaucracy and paternalistic power domination (Clarke et al 2007; Malpass et al, 2007).

Theorists argued that the development of consumerist discourse results in customers having the "capacity to act freely, behave in an unconstrained way and make independent choices" (Bodolica et al, 2015). Thompson (1989) argues that these choices are driven by "individual wants and desires" which creates a level tension when considering practitioner perspectives of the level of choice that customers can exercise within the intersect between agency and structure. Practitioners articulated a view that choice was neither a priority due to the, "need not to compete for business" (P3), and the perception that local authorities didn't provide choice as customers, "live where you live and access the services you can and get what you're given". Whilst Clarke et al (2007) posit that customers are

empowered to challenge "paternalistic powers", practitioners suggested that beyond formal mechanisms such as feedback and complaints, customers had limited influence over the concept of choice and how this influenced the design and delivery of services and in turn the extent to which value was co-created and positive impact achieved. This issue was perceived to be further compounded by local authority strategies to manage budget cuts with investment, efficiency and retrenchment approaches all perceived to further limit the perception of choice for customers (Hastings et al, 2015).

Consumerist literature and Giddens structuration theory both reinforce principles of customer empowerment, autonomy and a perceived freedom to act (Giddens, 1989; Archer, 2010). Practitioners referenced the positive impact that participation had on empowering customers and helping them to become more self-sufficient (p4, p10). Where Archer (2010) argued for greater recognition of the impact of constraints within Giddens' structuration theory, practitioners were actively seeking to remove any barriers as empowered customers were perceived to be more self-sufficient and in turn required less support from the local authority. The underlying rationale and benefit associated with such approaches was very much centred around cost reduction as helping customers to help themselves reduced need for council services thereby reinforcing the view that co-creation of value is predominantly driven from the perspective of the provider rather than the customer's experience of value (Heinonen et al, 2010; Gronroos and Gummerus, 2014).

Cost reduction was articulated within organisational strategy documents as a benefit achievable through participative approaches to service design and delivery. This perspective aligns with extant literature and the recognition that delivering cost reductions strategies requires customers play an increased role in service design and delivery (King et al, 1998; Pratchett, 1999; Cooper et al, 2006; Kennedy, 2007; Schumpeter, 2010; Timney, 2015). Cost was a common theme within

practitioner discourse with participant 9 arguing that the main driver is, "Money. Ultimately that's what it is. There are a lot of other benefits as well but the big one is driving down cost". This perspective was echoed by Participant 16, "As an organisation, we've got in the same way as other local authorities and have huge savings to achieve." Whilst some practitioners saw participation as a mechanism through which costs could be reduced, other practitioners cautioned against such approaches as, "involving customers too much won't be helpful because it becomes non-viable or non-cost effective", (p3). This tension between involving or not involving customers in the development and implementation of cost reduction strategies was apparent across practitioner interviews with Participant 5 arguing that the act of having to deliver cost reduction was a barrier to engaging the customers directly.

Giddens (1998) argued that the evolution of customers from passive recipient to reflexive actor led to a strengthening of decision making. However, practitioners argued that whilst customer participation could on occasion enable swifter internal decision making processes, the extent to which customers were involved in direct decision making was argued to be somewhat limited. Kennedy (2007) suggested that citizen participation increases inefficiency of decision-making processes as practitioners perceive citizens to not have the requisite expertise to address technical issues, however, practitioners didn't express this view regarding customer capability, the issue from their perspective was one of purpose, value and the point at which customers should be engaged in value creation processes. For practitioners interviewed, participant involvement was in the main something done as part of a validation exercise for decisions or proposals already developed. This assertion is reflected in Participant 5's view, "I haven't seen a lot of evidence of councils that say OK, I'm getting you in at ground level before we've done anything", a view shared by Participant 15, "I'm not aware of anyone actually sitting down from scratch and saying this is a pot of money, this is what we want to achieve, how do we do it?" Whilst the benefit of customer participation was noted,

within the context of decision making, participants viewed customer involvement in decision making as "tick box" exercise (participants 3, 6, 16 and 17) thereby representing an opportunity to delve further in to this specific area.

5.6 Factor enabling or constraining the role of customers

Culture was perceived to be both an enabling and constraining factor in determining the role that customers play in the intersect between agency and structure. Practitioners perceived the local government culture as being "traditional", "one size fits all" and "not wanting to involve customers" (organisations 13, 27 and p7) with a signficant gap between the current state and a desired state which was "customer-focused", with customers actively involved through participative approaches (organisations 17, 18, 20, 23, 24, 32, 34, 42). Giddens (1984) articulated this cultural shift as being an "evolutionary transformation" that represents more than a "progression of change" involving social development and change that spans the "spectrum of human history." Practitioners articulated the cultural shift as something involving a change from current to future state with new capabilities being developed and embedded around customer-centricity and performance management. The cultural shift that they saw was holistic within the context of the organisation and the employees within but was not as far reaching as Giddens posited in his theories concerning evolutionism and adaptation.

Literature suggests that local authorities have sought to improve engagement with customers through the devolution of power and influence to customers, communities and service users (Foot, 2009, Osborne et al, 2013; Firmstone & Coleman, 2015; Wirtz & Langer, 2016). A common theme across practitioner discourse was an emphasis on the *shift in thinking* required to transition from a predominantly inside-out view of the organisation to one which was focused on the customer and their influence on the design and delivery of services. Participant 12

talked about the benefit of participative approaches as coming from a "focus on the customer rather than your own internal views of how the world should work". This approach is largely consistent with the post-NPM movement whereby the intent shifted to empowerment and active participation of customers in the co-design of services (Giddens, 1998; Lengnick-Hall et al, 2000; Yi et al, 2011; Mukhtar et al, 2012; Donetto, 2014) and signals a direction of travel focused on tackling the direct and indirect constraints shaping the role that customers play in the design and delivery of services. Giddens (1984, p. 177) talks about the pre-existence of such constraints influencing and placing limit "on the feasible range of options open to an actor" and whilst practitioners acknowledge that there is more to do to achieve this shift, the intention to make this happen is evident in the content of organisational strategies and discourse with practitioners.

Technology as an enabling capability featured strongly both in organisational strategies and practitioner interviews. However, as Giddens and Pierson (1998, p. 82) argued, "technology does nothing, except as implicated in the actions of human beings" and practitioners echoed this assertion with focus placed on technology and how technology could be used to enable improved interactions particularly within the context of customer participation. Practitioners viewed technology as providing the tools through which interactions could be simplified and standardised with current ways of working automated. Leveraging technology to re-shape the intersect between customers and local government was seen as enabling an improved customer experience at reduced cost. Within the context of structuration theory, Giddens and Pierson (1998, p. 83) argued that technology could positively influence social practice but its impact was dependent on, "what they [human agents] do in relation to machines and so forth, these are the stuff out of which structural properties are constructed." This viewpoint is consistent with practitioner thought and the sense that technology could help local authorities to "leapfrog" from where they are and in turn recast the intersect and relationship

between human agency in their role as customer or staff and the structures shaping interactions within those particular social constructs.

5.7 Summary

The findings of this research indicate that the role of customers both in the design and delivery of contact centre services is at a point of immaturity. The research has shown an absence of established frameworks within the local government sector to shape the intersect between agency and structure, particularly in relation to those services enabled through contact centre environments. There are a plethora of terms used to describe human agency within the context of local government with these terms often used interchangeably. This approach creates challenges when considering the importance of such labels both in relation to how agents or customers are engaged in the design and delivery of customer-facing services.

The absence of defined frameworks was seen to result in a one size fits all with practitioners failing to develop a clear and coherent view of macro and micro phenomena thereby constraining the ability of the organisation to leverage benefits posited to be realisable through more participative approaches to service design and delivery. When considering practitioner perceptions of current discourse and practice, local authorities were understood to be approximately ten to fifteen years behind industry trends (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2000; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Graf, 2007; Nambisan, 2008; Elg et al, 2012; Mukhtar et al, 2012; Corbett, 2014; McShane & Sabadoz, 2015; Omar et al, 2016).

A sense of passivity on the part of customers was apparent in practitioner discourse with participants seeing local authority agents as having allocative and authoritative rights over resources engaged in the design and delivery of contact centre services. The role of customers was determined by the local authority with interactions shaped by normative regulation as determined by human agency or practitioners

within the organisation. The role that customers played was seen to differ depending on service complexity with more complex services requiring greater participation on the part of the customer with resources allocated to individuals to enable self-support and primarily reduce costs to the local authority through reduced demand and fewer interactions with customers.

There were differing perceptions of the value and benefits derived through greater involvement of customers in the design and delivery of local government services. Whilst organisations posited views around improved customer experience, decision-making and cost within strategy documents, there was little consensus in the literature and practitioner discourse with participants perceived to question the purpose and point at which customers should be engaged in participative processes.

The findings have shown notable reference to passivity on the part of customers with little evidence of a shift from passive recipient to reflexive actor set out within Giddens (1998) structuration theory. Human agency within local authorities are perceived to shape normative regulation and hold allocative and authoritative powers required to deploy resources within socially created constructs. Without a cultural and behavioural shift within local authorities resulting in greater reflexivity on the part of all social actors within given social constructs, the opportunity to embrace and achieve the potential benefits of greater customer participation within the design and delivery of customer-facing contact centre services remain untapped and unrealised.

6 Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This chapter draws insight from the research findings to address the overarching research question and research objectives. This chapter includes a number of sections with the first detailing the research findings reviewed against literature thereby assessing alignment with extant academic thinking; the second section considers conclusions relating to the research objectives; section three takes themes identified through thematic analysis and critically examines the implications for knowledge and practice. Limitations within this current programme of study are explored and associated next steps for future research are set out.

6.2 Conclusions relating to literature

The review of extant literature identified a number of gaps relating to the intersect between agency and structure and in turn the participative role that human agents or customers play within the design and delivery of local government contact centre services. Whilst consumerist discourse has moved thinking on in relation to the concept of "customer", the literature describes multiple labels, definitions and interchangeability of such terms within differing contexts and settings (McLaughlin, 2009; Clayton, 2013; Bodolica et al, 2015). The current programme of study found a consistent view within organisational strategies and practitioner discourse identifying eleven different labels used to describe "customers" with nuanced perceptions and definitions apparent across the sector. Without clarity in terms of what or who a customer is it's difficult to see how the sector can take a common and consistent approach to customer participation in the design and delivery of customer-facing services and in turn the resultant benefits or value realisable through such approaches.

A key theme apparent within extant literature relates to the connection between individual and society and whether one approaches this issue by emphasising, "the agency of individuals or the power of social structures" (Elliott, 2014, p. 11). Practitioners rarely referenced organisational structures but did place notable emphasis on the perceived passivity of customers within the intersect between agency and the rules and resources shaping social constructs (Giddens, 1984). In assessing the subjective meaning of actions, practitioners differentiated between customers and staff viewing the latter as having a level of autonomy not possessed by customers. Staff were perceived to determine or ensure adherence to normative regulation and through which constraints shaping the role of the customer were applied. Consistent with Giddens (1984) view that individual actors cannot change constraints, there was a sense amongst practitioners that these constraints, which in turn shaped social constructs, were determined through the coming together of practitioners over time with feedback invited from customers thereby reflecting the passive nature of these social actors. Where Giddens (1989) perceived all actors to have the capability to do otherwise in any given social construct, the constraints or "conditions of action" (Bryant and Jary, 2001, p. 17-18) as set out by human agency within the local authority were perceived by practitioners to shape customer role, level of action and resultant value created.

Structuration can be seen to link both macro and micro aspects through a process of "methodological situationalism" whereby macro events consist of "aggregations and repetitions" of micro-events (Collins, 1981). Practitioners adopted a somewhat reductionist approach to the macro and micro with differing approaches adopted to gather insight and engage customer groups. Elias' (1939) theory of figuration sought to frame the macro and micro through shifting figurations, practitioners adopted data-driven approaches to understand the macro and engagement at a one to one level to make sense of the micro (Mennell, 1998). Each

approach was seen as discrete thereby missing the inherent influence between micro and macro phenomena.

The degree of power exercised by human agency was explored extensively in practitioner discourse particularly in relation to those individuals who possessed allocative capabilities. In considering levels of participation across service design and delivery of customer-facing contact centre services, practitioners referenced the capability to mobilise or commission resources thereby providing alignment with Giddens (1984) concept of domination within wider structuration theory. Where services were deemed to be of lower levels of complexity, the research identified low levels of customer participation with responsibility for allocating resource sitting with the local authority. However, where services were more complex in nature, local authorities were increasingly embarking on a process of retrenchment with customers expected to take a much greater participative role with higher levels of involvement in self-directed support (Hastings et al, 2015) the rationale for which was larger seen to be driven by cost reduction by practitioners.

The rationale for customer participation in service design and delivery has been examined extensively in extant literature with a number of frameworks in existence (Arnstein, 1969; Checkoway & Kingsley, 1978; Mills & Morris, 1986; Bitner et al, 1997; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Roberts, 2004; Cooper et al, 2006; Buckwalter, 2014; Eisingerich et al, 2014; Timney, 2015). However, there is limited evidence of these frameworks being applied to a local government contact centre context within current academic discourse (King et al, 1998; Pratchett, 1999; Cooper et al, 2006; Kennedy, 2007; Schumpeter, 2010; Timney, 2015; Dong et al, 2015). This assertion was reinforced through this research with no common or consistent customer participation framework deployed across local authorities. Where approaches existed, there was limited consistency across organisations and a sense that current solutions were experimental due to the absence of coherence

around the purpose, value and benefit of leveraging customer participation in the design and delivery of customer-facing services.

6.3 Conclusions relating to research objectives

The research was intended to examine customer role at the intersect of agency and structure in local government service design and delivery with specific objectives relating to practitioner perspectives of the concept of customer, the role that customers play, the impact of participative approaches and factors enabling and or constraining customer role.

The prevalence of customer within practitioner discourse was apparent throughout this research with such terminology both established and accepted in local government parlance. Whilst local authorities had shifted to embrace customer terminology, the plethora of differing labels and interchangeability suggested a low level of maturity in the adoption of customer-focused ways of working. This assertion was reinforced by practitioner perspectives of the limited importance of labels and a recognition of the need for cultural shift from a "traditional local government culture" to one which was "more modern and responsive" (organisation 13).

The research identified a clear recognition of the principle of power and the degree of power that social actors are perceived to have. Practitioner perspectives contrasted with the assertions of Clarke et al (2007) and Malpass et al (2007) who saw consumerist discourse as challenging paternalistic powers of the state. The research identified clear evidence of practitioners or professionals exhibiting "power-over" those accessing government services (Laverack, 2016, p. 11). Where Giddens (1984, p. 33) asserted that social actors could assert "command over objects, goods or material phenomena", the research identified that this level of

domination resided with those agents sitting within local authorities and not the wider customer base, a perspective consistent with that of Heinonen et al (2010) and Gronroos and Gummerus (2014).

Consistent with the above conclusion regarding power, the research demonstrated a common view regarding passivity on the part of customers. Where Giddens (Bryant and Jary, 2001) argued that actors demonstrated reflexivity and an ability to act otherwise, the research identified a different perspective with practitioners arguing that customers operated within the constraints as set out by human agents within the respective organisations. The applicability of structuration theory to customers within this context could therefore be argued to be somewhat limited with increased scope existing for this to be applied to the wider practitioner environment.

In considering practitioner perspectives of the role that customers play in the design and delivery of contact centre services, insight captured during the research aligned with Bitner et al's (1999) levels of participation. Transactional services were found to require low levels of involvement of customers with more complex services requiring a greater level of participation. The underlying rationale apparent for this was not a practitioner recognition of the value that customers can bring to services but more a reflection of costs and an opportunity for local authorities to retrench from more complex and in turn expensive services.

The research identified limited impact of customer participation on the customer experience, customer satisfaction and associated efficiency gains. Whilst some practical examples were highlighted, there was an absence of consistency across the sector. Practitioners recognised that they played a pivotal role in enabling delivery of benefits associated with participative principles particularly in relation to co-creation of positive experiences and cost reduction and acknowledged that current approaches constrained customer ability to intervene within the service

design and delivery process. Attainment of measurable impact can only be realised if practitioners actively engage in the principles of participation.

The need to reduce costs across the local government sector was seen as a driver for customer participation but the pace at which cuts were required was also viewed as a barrier to moving to more participative approaches to service delivery. Whilst extant literature identified a range of cost reduction benefits achievable through participative approaches, the research identified little evidence of tangible cashable efficiencies being derived through current practice.

Organisational culture represents both an enabling and constraining factor in determining the role of customers. The current culture within local authorities was seen as traditional with a reluctance to include customers unless absolutely necessary. The gap between current state and future state was seen to be significant with practitioners (participant 2) seeing the journey as something to be addressed over a ten year period with this assertion being echoed by comparisons with extant literature which suggested that local authorities were between ten to fifteen years behind industry trends (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2000; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Graf, 2007; Nambisan, 2008; Elg et al, 2012; Mukhtar et al, 2012; Corbett, 2014; McShane & Sabadoz, 2015; Omar et al, 2016).

Technology was perceived to be an enabler and constraint impacting current participative approaches. Whilst practitioners saw technology as a way of enabling new ways of working and a greater role for customers in the design and delivery of services, Giddens and Pierson (1998) argued that whilst technology can positively impact social practice, it requires clarity of thought in relation to how technology can or needs to be leveraged within the wider social construct. With a clear strategy for customer participation, awareness and understanding of current and desired approaches to signification, normative regulation and domination, the value anticipated and expected from enabling technologies may not be realised.

6.4 Recommendations

The absence of established participative frameworks and their application within a local government context is reflected through a review of extant literature and the findings of this research. Whilst extensive academic thought exists regarding social action, customer participation and the need to drive efficiencies given the wider economic challenges facing local government, this research has demonstrated that local authorities have failed to capitalise on the promise that such approaches can bring both in terms of improved customer experience and organisational efficiency (King et al, 1998; Pratchett, 1999; Cooper et al, 2006). It is against this backdrop that the following recommendations are made:

1. The plethora of labels used to describe customers is a significant barrier when considering the introduction of participative principles to the design and delivery of contact centre services. The local government sector should recognise and adopt common language to describe differing customer groups, their respective roles, normative regulation governing such roles and clarity regarding the scope and scale of their transformative capacity and capability. This classification schema must cover the cradle to grave support that local authorities provide to customers and the differing roles that customers play at differing points in their lives within this end to end journey.
2. Whilst a number of participative frameworks exist across extant academic literature, awareness of such approaches was limited across local authorities sampled. Figure 4 (p. 115) provides a model arising from this research which sets out those inputs perceived to enable participative approaches together with practitioner perceptions of impact. Leveraging insight from this research, the local government sector should seek to define, develop and implement a common and consistent framework for

customer participation spanning the design and delivery of contact centre services. This framework should seek to address the multi-level, multi-dimensional nature of local government encompassing macro and micro perspectives.

3. Local authorities have failed to capitalise on the potential promise that customer participation can enable both in terms of improved outcomes for customers and organisations alike. Whilst positive intent exists within organisational strategy documentation with acknowledgement of the potential impact afforded through customer participation in the design and delivery of contact centre services, operationalising this intent requires targeted interventions which are unlikely to occur without external mandate and financial and operational support for practitioners in both enabling and delivering the change. If the requisite shift to more collaborative and participative approaches to provision are to occur, local authorities must seek collective investment and support from central government.
4. Local authorities have faced and continue to face significant cost pressures as central government budgets are cut and the need to do more with less continues. Customer participation can enable the delivery of notable tangible benefits as evidenced within extant literature and pockets of good practice identified through this programme of research. Local authorities should define and develop a clear case for change which sets out planned benefits and how these will be realised through the implementation of more participative approaches to service design and delivery which co-create value for the local authority and customers alike.
5. A plethora of literature exists which details the challenges and barriers associated with the adoption of participative principles across a number of sectors. Whilst literature is limited within the context of local government, this research provides a point of reference through which practitioners can understand potential challenges and lessons learned thereby helping to

ensure that local authorities avoid potential pitfalls or issues experienced previously. Prior to embracing a shift to participative approaches, practitioners should review these constraints and define approaches to mitigate or manage their potential impact to planned changes.

6.5 Limitations of the study

The limitations of the research methods and associated design were articulated within the research methodology section. These limitations have been revisited with known limitations outlined below.

The research sought to achieve data saturation through thematic analysis of a representative sample of customer strategies and engagement with practitioners leading, managing and delivering operations across the local government sector. The sample size may be seen as a limiting factor, however, the use of semi-structured interviews and access to high performing practitioners from across the local government sector has provided rich insight which adds to an under-researched sector and topic.

The research was approached from an interpretivist perspective with focused placed on context and meaning rather than seeking to determine law-like generalisations. The very nature of such approaches does constrain the extent to which research findings can be transferred to the wider local government sector and beyond. As the research was concerned with lived experiences of practitioners, the perspectives derived through this programme of study provide insight which practitioners can leverage in future discourse and praxis.

Participants were drawn from the researcher's professional network thereby increasing scope for researcher bias during the interview process. Throughout the research phases, the researcher was mindful for scope for selective subjectivity to

impact knowledge creation processes through application of tacit knowledge. Throughout the research programme, the researcher used primary data as a key anchor point, revisiting core datasets regularly to ensure that assumptions made and assertions posited were underpinned by clear evidence.

6.6 Contribution to knowledge and practice

This study provides a level of insight to under researched disciplines spanning practitioner perspectives of customer participation within local government contact centre service design and delivery through a lens of structuration theory. The practitioner perspective provides a clear contribution to praxis across local government providing sector-specific insight and recommendations to help drive improved customer experience at reduced cost. The absence of empirical research relating to customer participation within the local government sector means that this research provides a clear evidence base through which professional practice can be developed.

The research examined the intersect between agency and structure and an actor's ability to act otherwise in any given social construct (Giddens, 1989). Perceptions of passivity and a prevalence of "conditions of action" were viewed as constraining the role of customers in the design and delivery of services (Bryant and Jary, 2001, p. 17-18). This perspective is counter to Giddens view espoused within structuration theory and therefore adds to the body of literature shaping academic thought around "the agency of individuals or the power of social structures" (Elliott, 2014, p. 11).

Local authorities continue to face significant financial challenges against a backdrop of increasing demand across a range of channels and services. As contact centres represent the first point of entry for a high proportion of customers accessing local government services, this research provides practitioners with a

model which clearly identifies and articulates the key elements shaping participative approaches to service design and delivery which are perceived to deliver critical outcomes around cost reduction and improved customer experience. The model sets out the drivers for participation thereby reinforcing a need to progress participative approaches to service design and delivery and in turn providing contact centre practitioners with the component parts of a comprehensive case for change. It identifies key inputs around customer insight including perspectives on behaviour, experience, attitudes, needs and wants thereby enabling practitioners to understand and reflect on those inputs required to drive participative approaches and identify any capability gaps at an organisational level. Critical enablers required to make the shift including clarity of thought around strategy, leadership, culture, technology and how experiential insight and knowledge can be brought to bear are defined and identify a number of actions required and associated investment decisions needed to enable a shift to more participative design and delivery of contact centre services. The research and associated model further contributes to professional practice through a clear articulation of the perceived impact of customer role from practitioners across the sector and specifically those individuals charged with the design and delivery of local government services within a contact centre environment. Through identification of critical insights and development of a theoretical framework for professional practice, contact centre practitioners can leverage these outputs to shape local strategy, policy and the resultant value derived by local authorities and customers alike.

This research adds to the existing body of literature on structuration theory and customer participation within the local government sector. The current gap relating to the role of customers within the design and delivery of contact centre services has been reduced and whilst previous studies have considered the impact of customer participation across other sectors, this research provides specific insight as to practitioner perspectives on the role that customers can and do play

within local government. This research is directly aiding professional practice as the insights drawn from this study have and continue to influence ongoing personal and professional discourse and associated transformation activities within the local government sector.

6.7 Opportunities for further research

The current study has considered customer role at the intersect between agency and structure with focus placed on the participative role of customers within local government. The research was approached through the lens of structuration theory with focus primarily placed on customers. Future research focused on each of the actors involved in participation including an examination of approaches to signification, normative regulation and domination from differing actor perspectives may yield greater insight regarding the complexity of social interactions and socially created constructs.

The practitioner perspective provides a unique insight on this topic but expanding this to include a wider range of organisations and practitioners may yield further insight on this particular area of research.

The research adopted a cross-sectional design approach with focus placed on given point in time. A longitudinal research approach may yield wider insights spanning differing periods of time.

7 Bibliography

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8 Appendices

8.1 Appendix 1: Organisational listing

Local Authority	Description	Key
Barnsley	Metropolitan district council of the Metropolitan Borough of Barnsley.	Organisation 1
Bath and North East Somerset	The unitary authority of Bath and North East Somerset Council.	Organisation 2
Birmingham	Metropolitan district council of Birmingham	Organisation 3
Bournemouth	The unitary authority of Bournemouth.	Organisation 4
Bracknell Forest	The unitary authority of Bracknell Forest Borough Council.	Organisation 5
Bradford	Metropolitan district council of the City of Bradford.	Organisation 6
Brighton and Hove	The unitary authority of Brighton and Hove City Council	Organisation 7
Calderdale	Metropolitan borough of West Yorkshire.	Organisation 8

Central Bedfordshire	The unitary authority of mid and south Bedfordshire.	Organisation 9
Cheshire West and Chester	The unitary authority of west Cheshire and Chester.	Organisation 10
Cornwall	The unitary authority of the county of Cornwall.	Organisation 11
Derby	The unitary authority of the city of Derby.	Organisation 12
Doncaster	Metropolitan district council of South Yorkshire.	Organisation 13
Durham	The unitary authority of County Durham.	Organisation 14
North East Lincolnshire	The unitary authority of North East Lincolnshire.	Organisation 15
East Riding of Yorkshire	The unitary authority of East Riding of Yorkshire.	Organisation 16
Gateshead	Metropolitan borough in Tyne and Wear.	Organisation 17
Herefordshire	The unitary authority of the county of Herefordshire.	Organisation 18
Knowsley	Metropolitan borough in Merseyside.	Organisation 19
Leeds	Metropolitan district council of the City of Leeds	Organisation 20

Leicester	The unitary authority of the City of Leicester.	Organisation 21
Manchester	Metropolitan district council of the City of Manchester	Organisation 22
Milton Keynes	The unitary authority of the Borough of Milton Keynes.	Organisation 23
Newcastle	The unitary authority of Newcastle.	Organisation 24
North Somerset	The unitary authority of part of the County of Somerset headquartered in Weston-super-Mare.	Organisation 25
Northumberland	The unitary authority in North East England headquartered in Morpeth.	Organisation 26
Peterborough	The unitary authority of the Soke of Peterborough.	Organisation 27
Plymouth	The unitary authority of the City of Plymouth	Organisation 28
Reading	The unitary authority of the Borough of Reading.	Organisation 29
Salford	Metropolitan district council of the City of Salford.	Organisation 30
Sandwell	Metropolitan district council of the	Organisation 31

	Metropolitan Borough of Sandwell in the West Midlands.	
Sheffield	Metropolitan district council of the metropolitan borough of Sheffield in South Yorkshire.	Organisation 32
Shropshire	The unitary authority of the County of Shropshire (excluding Telford and Wrekin).	Organisation 33
Slough	The unitary authority of the Borough of Slough.	Organisation 34
Solihull	Metropolitan Borough of the West Midlands, headquartered in West Midlands.	Organisation 35
Southampton	The unitary authority of the City of Southampton	Organisation 36
South Tyneside	Metropolitan district council of the Metropolitan Borough of South Tyneside in North East England.	Organisation 37
Stoke	The unitary authority of the city of Stoke-On-Trent	Organisation 38

Sunderland	Metropolitan district council of the City of Sunderland.	Organisation 39
Trafford	Metropolitan district council of the Metropolitan Borough of Trafford.	Organisation 40
Walsall	Metropolitan district council of the Metropolitan Borough of Walsall	Organisation 41
Warrington	The unitary authority of the borough of Warrington.	Organisation 42
Wirral	Metropolitan district council of the Metropolitan Borough of Wirral.	Organisation 43.
York	The unitary authority of the City of York.	Organisation 44

8.2 Appendix 2: Profile of Interview Participants

Participant	Current role	Description of relevant experience	Duration of relevant experience
Participant 1 (P1)	Service improvement consultant	Operated at service improvement manager level across a number of local authorities	8 years
Participant 2 (P2)	Deputy Chief Information Officer	Operated at service director, head of service and service manager levels	25 years
Participant 3 (P3)	Head of Service – Customer Services	Operated at head of service and service manager levels	18 years
Participant 4 (P4)	Head of Service – Professional Services	Operated at head of service and service manager levels	25 years
Participant 5 (P5)	Service improvement consultant	Operated at service director, head of service and service manager levels	30 years
Participant 6 (P6)	Head of Service – Customer Services	Operated at head of service and service manager levels	18 years

Participant 7 (P7)	Service improvement consultant	Operated at service improvement manager level across a number of local authorities	9 years
Participant 8 (P8)	Service Manager – Performance Improvement	Operated at service manager and team leader levels	15 years
Participant 9 (P9)	Head of Service – Customer Services	Operated at head of service and service manager levels	14 years
Participant 10 (P10)	Head of Service – Performance Improvement	Operated at head of service and service manager levels	15 years
Participant 11 (P11)	Service Manager – Customer Services	Operated at service manager and team leader levels	12 years
Participant 12 (P12)	Service Manager - Digital	Operated at service manager and team leader levels	11 years
Participant 13 (P13)	Head of Service - Digital	Operated at head of service and service manager levels	16 years
Participant 14 (P14)	Head of Service – Adult Services	Operated at head of service and service manager levels	30 years
Participant 15 (P15)	Head of Service – Customer Services	Operated at head of service and service manager levels	15 years

Participant 16 (P16)	Service Director – Customer Services	Operated at service director, head of service and service manager levels	25 years
Participant 17 (P17)	Service Director – Customer Services	Operated at service director, head of service and service manager levels	30 years

8.3 Appendix 3: Informed Consent Form

Project Title: Understanding practitioner perspectives of the role of customers in local government service design and delivery

Doctorate of Business Administration (DBA) at University of Chester

What is the purpose of the study?

You are invited to take part in a research study the title of which is detailed above. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

Local authorities have long sought to improve engagement with customers through the development of relationship management approaches which seek to devolve power and influence to customers, communities and service users. However, the mechanisms used can be seen to fall short of providing the requisite insight and engagement needed to respond to developments within the private sector, new market conditions and customer requirements.

Successive governments have increasingly focused on customer and community involvement as a way of optimising service provision and improving democratic accountability. However, whilst the prevalence of such approaches has increased with local authorities seeking to enter in to partnership arrangements with their customers, there are differing views on the benefits of adopting such approaches particularly when considering the extent to which customers and communities can positively influence decisions about service design and delivery.

This research project therefore seeks to understand your perspectives on the role of customers in both local government contact centre service design and delivery and benefits derived through such participative approaches.

Why have I been invited to participate?

You have been chosen to take part in the study as you have unique insights both in terms of the role customers play in the design and delivery of local government contact centre services.

Do I have to take part?

Taking part in the study is voluntary. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you agree to proceed, you will partake in a semi-structured interview which is anticipated to last 30-60 minutes. The interview is intended to help understand the role of customers in local government service design and delivery and associated benefits realised. There may be cause to complete a follow-up interview to clarify any themes arising from the first interview.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

It is anticipated that this research will provide valuable insights as to current levels of customer participation in service design and delivery, furthering understanding of the topic and potential benefits afforded through such approaches.

All participants will be provided with a copy of the findings of the research.

Will what I say in this study be kept confidential?

All information collected will be kept strictly confidential. Your responses will be anonymised and no information will be attributed to you.

What should I do if I want to take part?

You should complete the attached consent form and return it to the researcher.

Contact for Further Information

Derek Nott

CONSENT FORM

Full title of Project: Understanding the role of customers in local government service design and delivery

Name: Derek Nott

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason. ☐
3. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐
4. I agree to the interview being audio recorded (a copy of the transcript and audio file will be provided to you) ☐
5. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications ☐
6. I agree that my data gathered in this study may be stored (after it has been anonymised) in a specialist data centre and may be used for future research. ☐

Name of Participant Date Signature

Name of Researcher Date Signature

8.4 Appendix 4: Interview Guide

- Research aim and objectives
- Interview Process
- Project Title
- Purpose of the study
- Why you have been invited to participate
- Consent
- Confidentiality
- Approach during the interview

Interview Questions

Objective	Question(s)
To analyse practitioner perspectives of the concept of "customer" within a local government context	• A number of labels are used to describe individuals interacting with and accessing local government services. in your experience, what labels are used to describe individuals interacting with or accessing local government? • Probe - Customer, citizen, service users, etc. • Probe - Why do different labels exist? • Probe - Do labels differ depending on role and nature of interaction? • Probe - Do these labels influence your perspective? • Probe - Do these labels influence roles in the design and delivery of services?

Objective	Question(s)
To analyse practitioner perspectives of the concept of "customer" within a local government context?	• What approaches are taken to engage customers to better understand their needs and expectations? • To what extent do local authorities "know" their customers? • Probe - Customer insight, surveys, feedback, focus groups, analysis of existing customer data sets, etc.
To examine practitioner perspectives of the role that customers play in contact centre service design and delivery – service design	• To what extent are customers involved in the design of services? • What role do they play? Passive, collaborative, active? • Probe: • Passive: Unilateral decisions with no public engagement, one-way feedback, consultation, feedback through different media channels • Collaborative: Advisory working groups, open communication and processes, agency / public share decision power • Active: Agency delegates decision making to public groups, participants selected by the public, agency delegates decision power to public • Probe - How does their role influence the design of services? • Probe – How do they contribute to co-creation of value, impact, benefits?

Objective	Question(s)
To examine practitioner perspectives of the role that customers play in contact centre service design and delivery – service delivery	• To what extent are customers involved in the delivery of services? What role do they play? Low, moderate, high? • Probe: • Low levels of participation require the customer to be present to invoke service delivery. This may involve the customer reporting a missed bin collection or faulty streetlight. Any action required after this point lies with the local authority and any contractors commissioned to complete works on their behalf. • Moderate levels of participation require customer input for service creation to occur with needs assessment for benefits or social care falling in to this remit as the customer is required to provide information pertinent to their specific circumstances for the service to be invoked. • Higher level participation sees customer co-creating the service product or outcome. Within this context, the local authority cannot effectively deliver a service without involvement of the customer. Services within this category involve primary and secondary education, training and reablement which focuses on helping people to do things themselves rather than having things done for them. • Probe - How does their role influence the delivery of services?

Objective	Question(s)
	• Probe – How do they contribute to co-creation of value, impact, benefits?
To determine factors enabling and / or constraining the role of customers in contact centre service design and delivery	• How are customer participation initiatives led? • Probe - Are they driven by members, senior managers, staff? • Probe - What processes / procedures are in place to support customer participation? • Probes – Constraints around structures of legitimation (norms, values, standards and ways of working), domination (resource allocation and authorisation) and signification (rules governing communication and image) • Probe - How does the culture of the organisation influence participative approaches?
To determine factors enabling and / or constraining the role of customers in contact centre service design and delivery	• How are insights shared and lessons learned across the sector?
To determine factors enabling and / or constraining the role of customers in contact centre	• How is technology being leveraged to support participative approaches? • Probe - Customer relationship management, transactional capabilities, personal accounts

Objective	Question(s)
service design and delivery	• Probe - Collaboration platforms
To examine and evaluate practitioner perspectives on the impact customer participation has on service delivery	• What are the perceived benefits of customers participating in service design and delivery? • What value is derived through customer role in service delivery? • Probe - Have financial (i.e. cost reduction) or non-financial (i.e. improved customer experience) been delivered? • Probe - How were they identified? • Probe – How are these created / realised? • Probe - What was your timeframe for realising these benefits? • Probe - How did you quantify these benefits? • Probe - How did you/do you intend to measure the benefits?
All	• Is there anything further that you would like to add?
All	• Do you have any questions that you would like to ask at this point?

- Interview Close
    - Thank you
    - Next steps
- Close

8.5 Appendix 5: Interview transcripts

Transcripts from semi-structured interviews can be provided upon request.

8.6 Appendix 6: Coding Structure